北山結莉
Yuri Kitayama
Illustrator Riv
1
偽りの王国
精霊幻想記
【せいれいげんそうき】

Illustrations

「俺にはセリア先生がいますから」
「え、あ、その……」
セリアはとたんに恥ずかしくなったのか、
顔を真っ赤にして俯いてしまった。

Credits

Author	Kitayama Yuri
Translator	zmunjali - Cnine
Editors	Vrryou Akula149
Publisher	Hobby Japan

Illustrator	Riv
RAW	Syosetu
Book designer	Armaell

Table of Contents

- Illustrations
- Credits
- Chapter 1 Previous Life
- Chapter 2 Awakening
- Chapter 3 Kidnapping
- Chapter 4 Inquiry
- Chapter 5 Audience
- Chapter 6 Enrollment
- Chapter 7 Magic
- Chapter 8 Failure
- Chapter 9 Growth
- Chapter 10 Field Training~Part 1~
- Chapter 11 Field Training~Part 2~
- Chapter 12 False Charge
- Illustrations
- Glossary
  - Main Characters
  - Side Characters
  - Terms & Definitions

Chapter 1

Previous Life

Amakawa Haruto, a college student living in Tokyo.

Summer.

He was walking below the clear blue sky as the sun shone brightly above.
With the sun shining down combined with the asphalt on the ground, the area was filled with hot air rising causing a heat haze.
In such hostile environment, Haruto still had a cool expression on his face as he continued walking towards the University campus.
Along the way, Haruto discovered a group of female college students walking nearby secretly raising small shrill voices.

Haruto had this hard to approach atmosphere, tall along with a handsome face.
Also as a practitioner of ancient martial arts, he was able to train his body resulting in an excellent physique.
Therefore Haruto walking to University was seen as some sort of celebrity by the opposite sex.
Despite that, no rumours could be found about Haruto being interested in any girls.
It did not mean that he was into men.
Just that in the 20 or so years he had been alive, Haruto never found himself a girlfriend.

The reason was that there was only one person in his heart.
That person was Haruto's childhood friend.
Unfortunately, his crush never bore fruit.
Yearning for her, Haruto was almost able reached her but she suddenly vanished.
Five years passed since Haruto's childhood friend's disappearance.

The last time he talked to her was 13 years ago.

Ever since the time he first encountered her, it took no time for Haruto to fall for her.
Playing with her everyday, it was difficult for him not to notice his attraction towards her.
But Haruto's parents divorced when he was still young and he was taken by his father to live in his father's home town in the countryside.

At that time, the two childhood friends made a certain promise.
Someday, when they were reunited, they would get married.
There was no binding force to that promise, only a fleeting transient promise in their childhood.

But Haruto was determined to make that dream a reality and poured all his strength towards that promise.
To achieve their dream, he built his foundation towards manhood through the pursuit of knowledge, agriculture, housework, and martial arts.

He wanted to meet.
He could not stand not being able to meet her.
He did everything with great effort and impatiently waited until the day he reached adulthood for their reunion. Haruto blindly believed in the promise.
Haruto, who dedicated great effort into all his endeavors, was recognised by his father.
Owing to that, his father allowed Haruto to enroll in a famous high school near the area his childhood friend resided.

It was where a shocking reunion was about to happen.
Coincidentally, his childhood friend also enrolled in the same high school.
Dokun, Haruto could feel his heart race.
There was no mistake, it was her.
Even if her appearance had changed over the years, he would make such a mistake.
She was still in the distance but he knew because she was his beloved.

He was fascinated, looking at her back, covered by glossy black hair.
Her small, beautiful face.
Her skin, white as snow.
Her short stature, but possessing finely balanced features.
Her appearance, neat and tidy, giving her the most graceful atmosphere.
She was like a girl straight out of a painting.

Haruto felt grateful to the fate that reunited them.
But he simultaneously cursed that same fate.
Next to her was an unknown guy.

Haruto became scared.
Was it possible that the two were dating?
When he thought this, he became unable to call out to her.
And then just like that, while he was agonizing over what he should do, Haruto's childhood friend vanished.

Ever since then, Haruto continued to live in regret.
By the time he realised that she had vanished, Haruto finally noticed the great mistake he had committed.
His spirit almost broke.
He could not even let out a sound of his heartbreaking cry, only letting it resound in his body.

But, he did not give up.
There was no way that he would give up.
He would not be so easily discouraged with just this.
Because he did not get to confess his feelings yet.

He embraced the faint feeling that he would someday, somehow meet her as long as he was in Tokyo.
After graduating from high school, Haruto enrolled in a University in Tokyo.
But even to this day, he was not able to get his hands on a single piece of information about her.

Eventually, three years rolled by.
There was not a single day where he forgot about his beloved childhood friend.

He even sought the police's help to investigate his childhood friend's disappearance but the truth remained wrapped in a mystery.

After lectures ended, Haruto headed back home by bus.
The time was just before evening so there were only a handful of passengers riding the bus. Currently there were only three passengers including Haruto.
The inside of the bus was wrapped in silence.
Staring out the window, Haruto watched the flowery scenery pass by.

Suddenly, the bus started violently shaking.
Before he noticed, the bus was suspended in mid-air causing a floating feeling, followed by a sudden impact to his whole body. In an instant, Haruto's consciousness faded to black.

"…te…"

The moment before all became darkness, a beautiful voice in an unknown language resounded in his mind.

"…to the next news. This afternoon at 3:15 in the Tokyo ○○ prefecture, a bus and medium sized truck collided. Three bus passengers were pronounced dead on scene. Despite suffering serious injuries, the two drivers survived the accident."

Chapter 2
Awakening

Year 991 of the Holy Calendar.

Yufilia Continent, Beltram Kingdom.
In one corner of the Capital's slums, with his chest full of agony, a boy was lying on the ground.

"Ha~, ha~…"

Even after opening his eyes, the anguish he was feeling could not be extinguished nor could he distract himself from it. Knowing so, the boy still strongly gripped his chest.
Before he noticed, his body was already drenched in sweat.
His whole body felt hot.
It felt as if his flesh was on fire.
Suddenly, like a miracle, the torment subsided and slowly, warmth spread throughout his body.

(What was that…?)

The boy did not understand what just happened, only that the unpleasant feelings were slowly dissipating.
When he regained his composure, he took a look at his surroundings.
It was a gloomy and dirty alley lined by crude wooden houses.
Unpleasant odours drifted into his nose. He frowned at the foul air but thanks to the stench, his head cleared up a bit.
As for what happened during his sleep, he had no memory of.

At that moment, the boy realised he had slept on the ground.
Dirty clothes hung on his body. He felt the need to do something about his clothes but thought they could last a bit longer.
Lifting up his face, a vast clear blue sky was reflected in his eyes.

(What was that uncomfortable feeling and why am I lying down on a road?)

Having just awoken, he still could not think clearly despite having no memory of drinking sake.
He noticed the surrounding houses seemed unusual before realising their architecture differed greatly from the Japanese wooden style houses he was accustomed to.
Feeling uncomfortable, the boy lost himself in thought.
Moreover his body was not in the best condition. Maybe it was due to being exposed to the cold weather from sleeping on the road. His joints also ached.

(!?)

Trying to raise his body again, he noticed the greatest disaster. Screams were rising in the boy's head.
What entered his view was the body of a young child.
I'm supposed to be a college student.
No, I'm supposed to be an orphan.

(What's the meaning of this?)

The boy was confused at his overlapping memory.
Thinking slowly about the problem, the boy directed his gaze towards his own hands and feet.
It was not the healthy skin of a person living in a wealthy country like Japan.
On top of that, his skin was dry and body was frail as a result of malnutrition as well as being covered in dirt.
The boy tried rearranging his thoughts; there were no memories of him taking a bath there.

(Seriously…)

He unintentionally performed a tsukkomi on himself after witnessing his dirty self.
The clothes he wore were made from worn down rags.
Of course, he did not own a pair of shoes either.
However, he still felt grateful that he at least had something to wear.
He was unsure what his facial features were like but from his long

bangs, he discovered the slightly dirty hair was black in colour.

His limbs were in a similar state to his worn out clothes but his mind was not in chaos.
Cooling down his thoughts, he tried to assess his situation.
The boy's name was Rio, it was also Amakawa Haruto.
Looking at his memories, he determined that he was 7 years old in the current world, as well as a 20 year old Japanese man.

A wave of dizziness hit him due to excessive hunger. After confirming his situation, he sat on the ground and began to think.
He, as Amakawa Haruto still had recollections of his memories before he died.
He also had memories of Rio's everyday life until now.
He did not know the reason why he was unconscious on roadside just a while ago but for the time being, it was not important.

Possessing the knowledge of Amakawa Haruto along with obtaining Rio's memories, he concluded that at the moment, he was not on Earth.
Rio [11] was an orphaned child without education, but he knew the name of the country where he resided.
Judging from the level of civilization and taking into account the circumstances as well as other factors made him arrive at the conclusion that this country was not located on the Earth Amakawa Haruto knew.
Possibly, he was reincarnated.

(But it's really hard to believe… no, perhaps there's still some chance that this is a dream?)

But when Rio thought harder about the situation, the possibly of it being a dream was greatly lowered.

His mind was far too clear for it to be a dream.
Calming himself, he tried but failed to find any irregularities about himself.
At most, it was an influenza-like symptom that caused his joints to ache. This was reality and he had already assured himself that.
Rio never heard of this country's existence before on Earth. The

things such as Kings and nobles, things like countless numbers of vagrant orphans becoming slaves, the absence of electricity and any products of science. In addition, monsters existed in this world.
This was not a dream neither was it on Earth.

Currently, Rio was in the slums district of the Beltram Kingdom's capital.
It would not be an exaggeration to say that his condition was at the lowest and if things continued as such, he would not survive for long.
It seemed that is was due to luck that Rio was able to survive until now.

Only the most fortunate orphans were able to live in orphanages. As for the ones living in the slums, it was a never-ending struggle for survival; scavenging for scraps of food and pick-pocketing.
If his luck was good, he would be able to buy some cheap hard bread with the insignificant amount of money he looted. It was no surprise that he was suffering from malnutrition.
That was what Rio did every day to survive.
In such a condition, to be honest, it would not be strange if he dropped dead on the streets.

For the time being, he needed to secure some food but thoughts about his current situation still lingered.
It was common sense for weak orphans to form groups, however due to Rio's unusual black hair he was ostracized by orphan groups.
As a result, it was exceedingly difficult for him to cooperate with other orphans. One way or another, he managed to survive until now by himself.

(Now I need to find work and settle in but…)

It was difficult to find a workplace where they would employ an orphan.
It was convenient for people to treat orphans as if they never existed.
Even if he was able to find one by chance, it would be hard labour with low wages.

In that case, Rio wondered if he had any advantages in this world.
The skills he carried over may prove to be useful.

Most of the skills he possessed were ones he developed in his previous life.
He could perform mathematical calculations meaning he had a big advantage. Fortunately, this country was already using the decimal system.
Other skills that seemed useful were martial arts, cooking, and miscellaneous everyday life skills.

He had already engraved into his head how to use all those skills.
But currently, he lacked social status so it was challenging for him to make full use of his skills.
Either way, right now there was nothing in this place that could solve his problems.

Feeling the need to ease his hunger, Rio began looking around the city.
And then, Rio noticed another change that occurred ever since his memories awakened.
He noticed that a faint light was being emitted from people's bodies.

At first he thought it was just an illusion but it did not disappear even after he tried refocusing his eyes.

The amount of light emitted differed from person to person with the majority only emitting a small amount.
He already ran into hundreds of people since his memory awakened so he was confident that his ability to measure the amount of emitted light was fairly accurate.

Suddenly, Rio noticed his own body was emitting a similar light.
The amount was many times greater than that of other people.
No, it was best to say that his knowledge on this matter was still too limited.
Looking at other people, there was no way the light emission would be infinite.

Just like vapour rising from boiling water and dissolving into the air, that light was also coming out of Rio's body.
Moreover, the amount of light emitted started slowly increasing.
At the same time, he became more and more sensitive to that light.
It was as if he could feel his surroundings through his five senses.

Through his own eyes, he could see anything in the world that came in contact with the light as if they were his own eyes. He was able to grasp one of the properties of the mysterious light.
He could infinitely stretch his senses allowing him to perceive things beyond any normal person can.

(I have an unpleasant feeling the light's only function is to enhance my perception…)

Stretching his senses granted a feeling similar to his spirit parting his body. With the sudden increase in perception, a question appeared in his mind.
Was he the only one who could see the light?
Because the amount of light emitted from his body was clearly abnormal, Rio understood that being different may expose him to danger.

Anyhow, he needed to find a secluded place away from people. Rio immediately left the main street and entered a back alley and sat himself on the cold ground.

The amount of light emitting from his body continued to increase but there were no changes to his physical condition.
There was no need to be impatient.
He thought so with a serene mind.

Rio started meditating, his mind achieving perfect unity of body and mind[2].
He did not expect the martial arts he learned from his grandfather would become useful in such a way.
While still being aware of the hustle and bustle on the streets, a significant amount of time passed. Who knew how long he had been meditating for? His mind was already beyond its limit.

Having achieved unity of the mind, Rio felt an overflowing amount of energy pulsating throughout his body.

The power filling his body was as thick as blood.
The true nature of that light was magic.
The magical power gushing out from his body could not be perceived by the naked eye.

Therefore Rio instinctively understood that a powerful sense of imagination was required to control the magical power.
It still felt surreal to him.

(Alright…)

Feeling confident about his speculation, Rio slowly and cautiously began decreasing the amount of magical energy overflowing from his body.
It had a similar feeling to erasing one's presence.
Not entirely the same but similarities were noticed.
Understanding the concept, Rio immediately gained control over his magical powers.

Now, all of his magical powers were sealed within his body without a single speck flowing out.
The feeling could not be expressed solely with words but somehow he got the gist of it.
A slight smile emerged on Rio's face.

But a question still lingered in his mind.

What was that light?
Currently the only changes he felt were a sharpening of his senses.
And most people only released a small amount of magical powers from their bodies.
Rio questioned whether there were any other uses for it.
Quantity verses quality meant that he still had to carefully think about the appropriate conditions for its use.
For the time being, he suppressed the questions that kept popping into his head and tried absorbing back all his magical power surrounding him.

With that, he verified a number of things. He understood that his magical power could slowly move in accordance with his imagination and gather in one place.

However he still did not know where to store it all.
His knowledge was still too limited.
After making sure there were no people around, Rio released his magical powers over his body for examination.

Suddenly, in a flash, he felt power coursing through his body.
It felt like a body strengthening skill.
Judging from the various changes he observed in his body, he concluded it was a form of body strengthening[3]

(…my body feels light.)

He felt as if his insides were brimming with power.
Rio tried to test his newfound powers with a simple jump. In spite of possessing the body of a child, the height he reached was equal to that of the average professional basketball player's.
It was by pure chance he discovered the body reinforcement skill. While he only vaguely understood the concept before, he could now clearly imagine the body reinforcement skill.

By removing his brain's limiter, he would be able to gain even greater body enchanting abilities by imagining his body clad with magical power.
As expected, it seemed that it was a good idea.
Rio imagined body reinforcement while walking.
He was performing some light movements to confirm its effects.
The results were movements deemed impossible for a boy in such bad shape.

(This, it seems continuous usage of body reinforcement is possible…)

However to do so, he was required to expend even more magical power than normal.
Suddenly his body started screaming.
It was apparent that any further usage would incur damage to his body.
His flesh could not keep up with his body reinforcement technique.
An idea emerged in Rio's head. In that case, he would try and reinforce individual parts of his body. He imagined reinforcing his flesh's endurance[4] and focused on his muscle fibres and bones.
The burden on his body greatly lessened.
It seemed that this was also correct.
For the time being, Rio was satisfied with the results of his experiment.

But no matter how strong his ability or body reinforcement was, it could do nothing to supress his intense hunger. His stomach growled in confirmation.
Although his experiments were interesting, he was unable to continue unless he could secure food.

Looking up at the sky, it was already dusk.
Night would soon fall.

Truthfully, he had neither money nor a method to procure food through decent means.
In the worst case, he was prepared to go without food for the day. But at the very least, he wanted to have some sort of goal.
For the time being and the sake of his life, he needed to look around for hints at earning money. Rio left the back alley.

Walking unsteadily in the market, a large building suddenly came into view.
He could not read what was written on the signboard but understood the building belonged to the Adventurers' Guild.
He could earn money by becoming an adventurer.
But Rio immediately brushed off the idea because he was still underage.
One of the rules of the Adventurers' Guild was that they would only employ those who were of 12 years or older.
Rio once overheard other orphans talking about adventurers along with information about the age limit.
The manual labour limit was also 12 years old in Japan but in this world, many places did not have an age limit.
Because working children could also serve as war potential, many were used for manual labour.
However in the case of adventurers, there numerous cases where adventurers could not gain achievements due to the age limit.

Rio still considered it.
Speaking of adventurers, their work was somewhat vague. Rio imagined they risked their lives in exchange for acquiring raw materials and selling them.
In that case, there were no rules preventing him from collecting materials and selling them himself.

Only that the customers were not the Adventurers' Guild.
Possibly some merchant.
Rio decided to investigate items that would likely be bought by merchants.
He immediately put his idea to action and headed towards the marketplace according to the map of the capital in his mind.

"Oi brat! What're you looking at? Get out of my sight!"

However when Rio was browsing the commodities in the marketplace, the sharp eyes of a shopkeeper noticed him and threateningly yelled at him.
Shopkeepers were wary against orphans as they usually attempted to steal items from the market. Orphans were poorly treated in the marketplace.
Since some orphans possessed small amounts of money, they were not instantly kicked out but shopkeepers would keep a keen eye on them in case of theft.
An orphan that only browsed market items would indeed be suspicious.
Thanks to that, Rio could not even freely browse the market.

At the current rate, he had no other choice than to find another way to earn money.
As he currently had no food on him, he could only scavenge for scraps of food.
Rio was urged to find himself anything edible to fill his stomach but as Amakawa Haruto, he harboured resistance against the idea.

Rio decided to make full use of his ancient martial arts skills he developed in his previous life.
He erased his presence and blended in with his surroundings.
Because Rio's existence faded in an instant, the shopkeeper who was only half-heartedly keeping an eye on him stopped looking out for him.

(Alright…!)

With his presence erased, Rio could look over the commodities displayed at the store.
What to sell? Where to sell?

Rio leisurely walked while wondering about that.
This skill gave him the opportunity to safely pilfer items with little risk.
But he chose not to do so.
His morals as Amakawa Haruto, an upstanding Japanese citizen prevented him.
Rio just walked amidst the stores understanding he could not touch the various commodities on display.
He was especially interested in the medicinal herbs, plants, and vegetables.
As politely as he could, he asked the store's salesperson about the goods.
While the salesperson was wary of Rio, he answered all the questions presented to him once he was stubbornly pressed by Rio.
Various plants were successfully cultivated on farmlands surrounding the capital but some could only grow in the wild.
For such plants, they needed to be grown outside of the capital's boundaries.
When required, adventurers were usually employed to harvest them.
Some adventurers would buy the plants they harvested with money from their own pockets.
However for a child like Rio to try and harvest these plants alone would be tantamount to suicide.
The salesperson could only give Rio a sympathetic look along with some advice.
Accepting the salesperson's advice, Rio could only show a bitter smile and thanked him.

It was certainly a dangerous endeavour but it was still better than sitting on a hungry stomach.

He could perform body and flesh reinforcement.
There was also the ancient martial arts from his previous life so he could stand his ground in battle.
In any case, he had no other choices but to go.
But the day was almost over.
Before the end of the day, he needed to find something to supress his hunger so he abandoned the thought for the time being.
Without searching for food scraps in garbage dumps as he usually would, Rio headed back towards his home in the slums.

To distract himself from the hunger, he recalled the various shocking events that transpired that day.
The first event was the awakening of his previous life's memories.
Recollections of Amakawa Haruto and him taking over as the main personality, but Rio's memories and consciousness also remained resulting in the two personalities fusing into one.
Both sides became the main personality, both fused perfectly with no complications.
He as Amakawa Haruto perfectly accepted Rio.
And Rio, the orphaned child, also accepted Amakawa Haruto.

In his previous life, Amakawa Haruto's purpose in life was to find the whereabouts of his childhood friend.
Apart from that goal, given his current situation, he had no other.
For the time being, he had no other choice than to live as Rio.

Rio also had something he must do in this world.
In the beginning, Rio did not live in slums in poverty.

His father and mother were adventurers.
The two formed a duo and travelled to a foreign nation together.
When Rio's mother became pregnant with Rio, she took a temporary retirement.
Naturally, his father became the sole bread winner for the family.
Until that time, the two always completed quests together.
Then Rio's father made a blunder during a quest with another adventurer.
And as a result died.

With the death of her husband, Rio's mother raised Rio all by herself.
Using money saved from their time as adventurers, she was somehow able to safely raise Rio.
But that only continued until Rio turned 5.
Rio's mother was a gorgeous woman overflowing with an alluring atmosphere.
She already had a child but was still young enough for the surrounding men to send lustful gazes at her.
Taking Rio hostage, a man acquainted with her during her adventuring days raped and killed her.

Rio witnessed his kind mother being raped in front of him.
At that time, he made sure to engrave the name and features of that man into his soul.

Rio did not give up on life. Even if he was forced to scavenge for scraps of food to survive, he swore to someday exact revenge.
The desire silently burned in his heart even to this day.
But on the other hand, Amakawa Haruto felt uneasy about revenge.
Suddenly the memory of that horrifying day replayed in his head.
Rio mourned with a frown.
He shook his head clearing the thought and hastened his pace.

Notes

1. From this point on, the boy with Rio's and Haruto's personalities will be referred to as Rio

2. Otherwise known as perfect Zen state in Wuxia novel

3. Enhancement of Physical Ability

4. Flesh Reinforcement

Chapter 3
Kidnapping

Rio walked along the winding street before turning into a hidden path. The path led directly to the red light district[11].
Following the main road in the red light district, he saw many soldiers looking awfully busy.

The red light district's main street was located closer to the slums than the market and commoner district's main street.
When the day turned into night, the streets became overflowing with prostitutes and men trying to buy their bodies.
Sweet voices calling out and negotiations being made could be heard along the street.
Public order in the red light district was surprisingly good due to nobles being among the many customers soliciting the area's services.
Only upstanding brothels were permitted to operate in most of the Kingdom.
The few doing operating illegally situated their business near the slums.

Rio was heading to that part of town.
Upon arriving, the sounds of competition between legal brothels immediately ceased, replaced by an eerie silence. Not a single person could be seen.
It was in such a place that Rio was passing through.
There were no good feelings associated with that place.
It took him less than a minute to arrive in the slums.

"Get lost!"

Then, Rio bumped into trouble.
A little distance from him were four rough looking men wearing

leather armour with cheap swords strapped to their waists.
The four men gave off the feeling of hoodlums.
An awful lot of noise was coming from the direction of the thugs.
Two of the men were carrying large sacks on their shoulders.
One sack moved as if a large animal was inside.

“What’re you doing!? Where’re we going!? Who are you!? Let me out! Don’t think things will end like this! Father won’t forgive you! I’ll send all of you flying!”

Glancing at the noisy bag and the appearance of the shady men, suspicion arose in Rio’s mind.
The voice of a young girl could be heard from the noisy sack.

“Che— she regained consciousness. Shut up! Quit fussing around!”

Loud voices could be heard from the dubious quartet.
The bag instantly slightly shook and shriveled.

“Idiot! Watch your voice!”
“Ye-Yes. Sorry aniki[21].”

The way the loud man was apologising suggested that aniki’s position was quite high.
It seemed that aniki was also the group’s leader.

“Che— for 10 gold coins this bag is awfully suspicious but this job is really profitable.”

The one referred to as aniki frowned while clicking his tongue. Judging from his expression, the baggage was proving to be very troublesome.

“Hehe, but 10 gold coins is really an unbelievable reward. With just this, we can spend 10 months drinking and playing around with women.”

All the underlings were smiling, their faces full of lust.
The leader was not disturbed at all.

In this country, one gold coin was enough to feed a common family for two months.

By the way, if he remembered correctly, the exchange rate for money was 100 copper coins for 1 silver coin, 50 silver coins for 1 gold coin, and 25 gold coins for 1 mystic coin.
“What kind of person’s inside? Based on the size and weight, I’d say it’s a girl.”

Unable to contain his curiosity, one of the men carrying the sack asked the leader to check what was inside.

“Maybe it’s a merchant or noble’s daughter… Oi, open the sack!”

Curiosity getting the best of him, the leader displayed a vulgar grin and ordered the sack to be opened.

“Are you sure?”
“Hmph, that man never said we couldn’t open the sack. And we need to find out if the contents are worth more than what we’re paid for. We’ll request another payment during the handover.”

The subordinates cheered hearing those words while the leader snorted.

“You, watch the surroundings and don’t let anyone come near. Well I doubt anyone’ll come to this place anyway.”

The leader ordered the man to set his bag on the ground. The man who was ordered from before had a “Let me see her face too” expression on his face.
But in Rio’s eyes, the lackey’s vigilance was extremely sloppy.

“Well then…”

After confirming their surroundings, the man placed the sack on the ground and roughly opened it.

“Kya!”

With a *thud*, a soft slender limb was exposed, together with a scream coming out from the young lady in the sack.

“Hehe, now we can enjoy a young woman to ourselves.”

Smiles crept onto the sketchy quartet’s faces after hearing the

young lady's cream.
They leisurely unfastened the ropes binding the sack.
Only 10 seconds were needed to finish the deed.
After seeing who emerged from inside the bag, the men leaked voices of admiration.

What they saw was a young girl around the same age as Rio.
Silky violet-blonde hair, purple coloured irides, and a determined expression; the charming girl had the appearance of an angel.
Due to her features and attire, she exuded the atmosphere of a high class individual.

Possibly she was the daughter of a noble.
Her exceptional beauty mesmerized Rio in an instant.
There was no mistake; a noble's daughter had just been kidnapped.
But for what reason? For such important cargo, they would not be handed over for transportation to some hooligans.
Rio was speechless and had no idea what was going on.
It was safe to say they must have received inside help from guards of the noble's house.

"Ah— Curiosity killed the cat huh? This is bad… we may have overstepped our boundaries."

The leader nervously scratched his head with a difficult expression painted on his face.
They must have understood what it meant for them to kidnap the girl.
They finally realised the gravity of the situation.

"Well good thing we only carried them this far. After reaching to our destination, let's ask for additional payment. C'mon, let's go! We gotta finish this quickly."

The criminals' plans continued along with the girl's misfortune.
Being glared at by the goons, the young girl tightly shut her eyes.

"Well come on. Quietly get back in the sack again."
"NO! <Flame Shot>!"[3]

The young girl raised her hands up and recited something.
Something started coming out from the palm of her hands.

However before the phenomenon of magical power could be converted into a magic spell, the girl received a sharp kick from the leader.

“Agh— gah ho…”

Rio was startled witnessing the young girl being blown away.
At the same time he was fascinated by the magic she was about to release.
Rio could only use his magical powers for body and flesh reinforcement while that young girl was doing something else entirely using an unknown technique.
Before the magic discharged, something resembling geometrical patterns floated in front of her.

“Che, that was a close one. I let my guard down. To think she’s a magic user, as expected of a noble’s daughter.”

The unfamiliar word “magic” reached Rio’s ears.

“Uu~…”

Looking at the young girl clutching her stomach in pain, one of the hoodlums opened his mouth.

“E~tto, she’s not dead yet right?”
“It’s alright. She’s still moaning in pain.”
“We don’t know if they’ll give us our payment for damaged goods…”
“Ah? Ah, well we’ll know at that time comes right?”

The leader’s outrageous conduct made his underlings tremble in fear. They responded by giving him troubled smiles.
From their conversation, they were a bunch of worthless people.

(What should I do…?)

While suppressing his impatience, Rio pondered at the question.
The young girl would not die from only that level of a kick.
But at this rate, she would be abandoned.
Or he could head over and provide her some assistance.
But that was easier said than done.

There were four opponents, based on Rio's estimations they were no threat to him.
Still, even with his abilities he was not had doubts he could flawlessly defeat all of them.
Moreover they were all armed while he was unarmed.
His opponents would not hesitate to kill him.
Even though Rio practiced ancient martial arts in his previous life, he had never once taken a person's life.
In other words, Rio had to fight barehanded against a group of four armed men who had experience in committing murder.
Furthermore, if he was slashed by one of those cheap blades, the injury would most likely suffer an infection.
Rio was strongly against killing other humans.
He recalled the words of his grandfather who was also his master.

If he remained in his position, the scene before him would soon disappear.
But the incident would not end just like that; the young girl would be moved somewhere against her will.
Rio heard from rumours that some brothels in the area sometimes held sadistic events where people gathered and tortured young girls.
There was a chance the girl in front of him would be sent to one such place.
However the incident unfolding before him had nothing to do with him.
Hiding and watching the group depart the area would leave a bad aftertaste, but there was no need for him to risk his life for a complete stranger.

Really? Was that really okay?
While Rio was mulling over those matters, by coincidence, it really was a coincidence, one coincidence on top of another, the girl's line of sight matched Rio's.
Noticing him, her face distorted in fear and anger. Seeing that, Rio felt he could no longer run away.
Another man came over with a sack.
The man suddenly started moving; he focused his line of sight on the young girl and let go of the sack.

“Ah!”

With a *thud*, a soft resigned voice resounded from inside the sack.

“Kya~”

From inside the bag, a young girl similar in age was kicked letting out a similar voice.
“Che— Oi, she’s not injured right?”

In a tired voice, the leader asked the man carrying to sack to verify the content’s safety.
With an evil grin, the subordinate opened the bag to confirm.
They were distracted, it was now or never.

(Damn it all!)

Rio wrapped his entire body in magical power in an instant and launched himself like a bullet. No other human being his age would be able to achieve the same speed.
He was shocked at the acceleration and resistance he never felt before. Even with his flesh reinforced, his body was still that of a child’s and should not be able to produce something to this extent.
Success of failure would be decided in an instant so immediately Rio seized the initiative.

“Na?”

The first to notice Rio was the leader and he immediately drew his blade. But in that short moment, Rio was already in front of him.

“Gu ha.”

Without letting the chance slip by, he twisted the leader’s elbow dislocating his joints before throwing him.
He flawlessly executed techniques learned from the ancient martial arts he practiced in his previous life.
By reinforcing his body, he was able to throw a grown man twice his size.
The leader did not know anything about Ukemi[4] and spectacularly hit the ground with a loud sound.

(Next!)

Rio was already moving his body.

“Eh?”

He gathered all his power and drove a kick into the abdomen of the man standing beside him. Using that force and his opponent’s own weight, Rio slammed the thug into the ground.

“GAH!”

Confirming his opponent was unconscious, he prepared to face the remaining thugs.

“This brat!”

Enraged by the loss of their companions, the remaining two chose to face Rio together.
If they took the girl hostage, the situation would be hopeless.
Multiple opponents meant they had more choices than him.
Rio was afraid of that.
However the men were suffocated by their emotions that they forgot to adopt the most effective means.

“Dieeeee!”

Brandishing a 50 cm long sword, one of the thugs rushed and slashed at Rio.
He avoided the blade by side stepping and launched a counter with his palm aimed at his opponent’s chin.
The counter connected with the thug’s chin and instantly knocked out him out.

“Y-You bastard!”

The last thug desperately brandished his blade but could not even come close to landing a hit on Rio.
Avoiding the poor swordsmanship, Rio slipped into the man’s bosom, grabbed the thug’s hand and forcefully twisted, disarming and making him unable to hold the weapon. He then knocked the thug out with a throw.

“Haa… Ha…”

I did it.

I ended up doing it.
Before he realised it, his body moved on its own.
It was strange for him to risk his life to save a young girl he never even met before.

Rio did not move an inch from where he was standing, because he was out of breath.
He felt his body temperature rising and his heart beating so wildly that he could hear it resounding throughout his body.
SHUT UP, he nearly screamed those words.

He was unable to deliver the final blow to the thugs.
He could not bring himself to kill them.
But he still had the skill and strength to overpower them and lightly damage their internal organs.
The damage was only to the extent where they lost consciousness.
Given the current situation, it would not be strange if they were fatally injured and died.
All kinds of terrible outcomes flooded Rio’s mind.
If by some chance the thugs died from their injuries, Rio would be unable to cope with the sense of guilt.

He currently lacked the resolution to kill another human being.
No problems would exist if he could calmly kill a person.
But he was not that kind of person.
And undoubtedly, none of the thugs were dead.
So he did not kill anyone yet.
Still all kinds of excuses for killing them popped up in his mind.
Realising the kind of thoughts he was harbouring made him feel disgusted.
What’s done is done.
At least he would not be blamed for helping the two young girls.
Rio fought down the emotions he was feeling to prevent them from showing on his face. He suddenly remembered the existence of the two girls and noticed one of them was watching him in awe.

The two girls resembled each other in appearance.

One of them was still trying to free herself from the sack while the one that got herself kicked was already freed.
From their violet-blonde hair and identical faces, Rio concluded the two were sisters.
The one who was causing a ruckus earlier was the elder sister while the one still trying to free herself was the younger sister.

“Are… you alright?”

Still breathing roughly, Rio timidly greeted the sisters.
The elder sister glared sharply at Rio.
From her glare, Rio found it difficult to believe they were the same age.
Rio’s train of thought halted for a second.
The same shining geometrical pattern that made her get kicked appeared again.

(Is that… magic?)

“Cough, cough. What are you waiting for? Help me!”
“O-Onee-sama, I just casted <Heal>[5] so please don’t move around so much. Don’t push yourself too hard…”

Ignoring her younger sister’s plea, the elder sister approached Rio and slapped him across the cheek.

“Eh?”

Pan, a dry sound resounded in their surroundings.
To this sudden development, Rio could not understand what was happening.
Why did this girl get angry at him?
Why would she slap her saviour?
He fell into confusion, his cheek stinging in pain.

“You watched us the whole time right? If that was the case you should’ve helped us sooner!”

Rio almost got himself slapped a second time.
However this time he was expecting it and caught the girl’s arm.
Her face became distorted in frustration and she tried using her free hand to slap him.

“…”

The young girl became hysteric and started acting violently. Rio started turning angry after experiencing such unreasonable treatment, but he could not treat a young girl like her poorly.

“Let go of my hand! Filthy! Smelly!”
“O-Onee-sama, he saved us so isn’t it wrong to get angry at him?”

The younger sister was trying to soothe the elder sister’s fury.

The elder sister could smell the foul odours originating from Rio and it was clearly reflected on her face.
She was also greatly shocked at his repulsive appearance.
Though thanks to the younger sister’s cries, the elder sister ceased her violent actions towards Rio.

Even if the other party was still very young, her actions were unreasonable since the beginning and Rio’s anger was reaching its boiling point.
He already got himself into another troubling situation.
The elder sister was glaring at his filthy forelocks.

“A-Aah. Thank you very much for saving us.”

Sensing Rio’s displeasure, the younger sisters came forward and lowered her head.

“No, it wasn’t much.”
As expected Rio could not disregard the young girl expressing her gratitude to him so he gave a curt reply.

“What? What kind of attitude is that?”

Rio decided to disregard the elder sister.

“O-Onee-sama!”

The dangerous atmosphere dissipated again due to the younger sister rebuking her elder sister.

“Hmph, I’ll forgive you for Flora.”

It appeared the younger sister’s name was Flora.

Seeing her older sister calm down, Flora breathed a sigh of relief. But right after that, the elder sister's words were like pouring oil onto a dying fire.

"Peasant, lead us to the noble district. As for the men over there… take two of them with us."

Rio was amazed at how easily he commanded him.

"You were able to throw them so this should be simple right?"

Rio was unamused at her attitude. In addition her tone was almost hysterical.
Her panic was probably due to only recently escaping from a horrific situation but the current Rio was too irritated to notice such things.

"…Is that the attitude one uses when asking for assistance?"

Rio understood it was necessary to provide assistance to the daughters of a noble.
But this girl's overbearing attitude chased out that thought.
He wanted her to at least consider his feelings a little.

"A-Ah no, I'm sorry! I would also like to request your help. If necessary, I will ask father to reward you!"

Rio's current impressions of nobles were rock bottom.
But thanks to Flora it did not drop any lower.
Surely the two girls must have experienced life void of hardships so far.

They got whatever they desired.
They were so dazzling for someone like Rio that it only gave birth to one vulgar thought after another. As for Haruto, he could not stand Flora's straightforwardness.

"…Understood."

Rio unwillingly agreed to Flora's request.

"Thank you very much!"
Rio got to work immediately.
The two young girls cut the sacks previously used to transport them

into ropes and Rio tied the men with them.
He also took their weapons along with any valuables he could find.
It was bulky but it could not be helped; the current him was in dire need of money.
Since a while ago his actions could already be classified as a crime so he did not bother justifying his actions.
Rio did not know of any laws regarding the treatment of a criminal's possessions. Since that was the case, he might as well loot all the thugs' belongings; there was nothing wrong with getting his hands on a few valuables.

"Hmph, so greedy…"

Looking at his behaviour, Christina [6] said those lines while looking down on him. Hearing that, Rio felt some resistance but pretended he did not hear anything and continued with his work.

Finishing his work, Rio and the sisters left the red light district and continued towards the market.
Along the way, people in the red light district looked at Rio and the young girls with great curiosity. However no one called out to them due to the foul smell Rio gave off.
Upon arrival at the market, soldiers immediately ran up to Rio and the sisters. Christina and Flora were put under their protection afterwards.

Notes

1. Prostitute district

2. Common Yakuza slang for senior

3. Read as Flame Shot, written as Flame Bullet Magic

4. A falling technique in Judo

5. Read as Heal, written as Recovery Magic

6. Ed: Christina is the elder sister's name. Yeah I don't know how we suddenly got her name either.

Chapter 4
Inquiry

Currently, Rio was locked up in jail inside the Royal Castle.
After Christina and Flora were found, the palace soldiers quickly placed them under their protection.
Therefore while Rio was still trying to make heads and tails of the situation, he was arrested and thrown in jail.
A little while later, he found out that Christina and Flora were princesses of the country.

Three days had gone by since he was arrested.
With meager amounts of time for sleep and meals, the majority of the time was used for interrogation.
That was how Rio passed his days in jail ever since he arrived.
While his body and mind were still asleep, he would be questioned every 5 minutes by over three investigators.

“Spit out what you know.”

Rio wondered how many questions he had already been asked over the three days.
Tired of hearing the same questions over and over again, he was disgusted by the suspicion placed on him in the first place.

“I already told you, I just happened to pass by. Bu chance when I was walking in an alley, I happened to see the kidnappers with those kids… with Christina-sama and Flora-sama. On an impulse I decided to help them. That’s all.”

The interrogator became visibly agitated when Rio mentioned “those kids”.
Realising it, he switched and called them by their honourific titles instead. Rio was becoming fed up at repeating the same testimony.

“You’re lying. You’re a spy aren’t you?”

Rio was asked the same question over and over again.

“I’m not lying.”

And Rio would resentfully spit out the same answer every time.

“Naa~, once again, you said that you only helped Christina-sama and Flora-sama on a whim. I find that really hard to believe.”

The interrogator said that while showing an unusual expression.
“Up until now, we’ve been courteous with you during our investigation. But if you refuse to tell us anything, we’ll have to change up our methods.”

The interrogator’s oppressive attitude was caused by the gloomy jail atmosphere and the lengthy yet fruitless interrogation.
For the interrogator, being able to keep up in appearances until now was praiseworthy.

“Heh~? And by what sort of means?”

Rio was smiling defiantly with a rebellious spark in his eyes.
Fed up, the interrogator returned Rio’s smile by striking him in the chest using the hilt of his sword.
Rio’s face was then slammed into the table.

“GAH!”

The interrogator repeatedly slammed Rio’s face into the table. By the second time, Rio’s lips were already starting to crack and bleed.
At least he could decrease the damage through flesh body reinforcement but he had difficulty controlling his magical powers.
It seemed that the shackles on his wrists were obstructing the flow of magical power.

“Isn’t it weird? For a kid like you to face four armed opponents and on top of that, defeat them. Furthermore, no ordinary orphan would be able possess that kind of training. It’s strange even considering when you caught them by surprise.”
The incident was too incomprehensible for the interrogator causing

him to shake his head.

“This is like a miserable play written by a peasant. You get what I’m saying?”

Rio was glaring at the interrogator as if he was his parents’ murderer.
The interrogator pulled Rio’s hair, raising his face to eye level and punched him in the stomach.

“KAH!”

Seeing Rio groan in pain, the interrogator revealed a satisfied expression.
It was certainly the attitude of a sadist.
The pain in his stomach made Rio’s face distort in pain.

“His Majesty told us to treat you with utmost consideration. After all, you are Christina-sama and Flora-sama’s saviour. It’s only natural.”

If that was the case, what the hell was with this treatment?
Rio’s frustration and anger was already reaching its boiling point.

“But you’re too dangerous. As I said before, all your testimonies are too suspicious. There are too many unknowns surrounding you. Even if I have to resort to force, I will extract the information out of you. Understand?”
Grasping Rio by the head, the interrogator was scowling directly in front of Rio’s face.
The two people hatefully glared at each other. Rio floated a ridiculing smile on his face.

“If I say I don’t know, then that means I don’t know.”

Rio readily answered without hesitation.
He did not try answering any other way because what he stated was the truth.

“Hmph. Can a criminal like you not understand His Majesty’s grace? Fine, there’s an easier way for scum like you to understand.”

Saying that as provocation, the interrogator patted Rio’s face.

“After all, you might tell me who the mastermind is. I wonder who it is. Is it a noble?”

To the interrogator’s misguided reasoning, Rio could only let out a tired sigh.

“You don’t know? Why not try asking the perpetra- GAH!”

Before he could finish his sentence, Rio was hit in the face.

“The perpetrators, THEY’RE ALREADY ALL DEAD! They were killed! You’re the only one left alive.”

Hearing those words, Rio’s face cramped up.
At that moment, he wondered if his body could hold up after receiving so many beatings.
But with existence of recovery magic, he reconsidered the thought as he could probably be kept alive for further questioning.

“Killed?”

“You know? Poison. Their meals were poisoned. Fortunately, your meals weren’t.”

While Rio still harboured some doubt towards the interrogator’s words, he believed what he was just told was the truth.

“…”

Hearing those words made him shiver.
To be able to poison the perpetrators, the mastermind behind the kidnapping incident must be somewhere in the castle.
But why did he not kill me?
That was because the mastermind would not be affected even if he was left alive.
Rio immediately arrived at that conclusion.
Rio and the mastermind had no connections. For Rio to be interrogated would be a benefit for the mastermind.
So Rio was deliberately left alive to throw off the investigators.
If that was the case the Rio’s life was not in danger for the time being.
However that was only limited to the mastermind.

If he got careless, the state would not hesitate to take his life.
Even though he rescued royalty, thanks to the suspicion placed on him he was treated as such.
If this trend continued, they would probably soon resort to torture.
In that case it would not be strange if he died.

(DAMN IT! At this rate I really will be killed…)

Feelings of anxiety and frustration began to accumulate.
Did he make the right decision by saving Christina and Flora?
If he ignored them, he would not have to suffer through such hardships.
This was the result of him getting caught up with his own feelings.
He just wanted to end the terrible incident; in the end Rio guessed he was just a selfish person.

“Hmph, how’s that? Feeling scared? If you’re afraid to die then tell us what you know.”

The interrogator ignorantly said that with an arrogant expression causing Rio to snort through his nose.
Seeing that, the interrogator hit Rio in the nose.

“Who’s the mastermind? From my superior’s investigations, you and those thugs never came in direct contact with the mastermind but received instructions through a third party.”

Rio was already fed up with everything. He could not do anything but protest which only worsened his situation.
Thinking about it, Rio thought he was a victim caught in the political crossfire occurring within the Royal Palace.

If that was the case, everything started to add up.
Disposing of the perpetrators by poisoning their meals and leaving Rio to fend for himself. Naturally he would be interrogated as he was the only remaining link to the incident.
Rio calmly analyzed the information he gathered so far.

Someone probably stood to gain from perpetrating the incident.
The mastermind was the most likely candidate since the thugs were disposed of to destroy any remaining evidence.

The losing side would fall into predicament and try their hardest to extract information from Rio.

For example, the mastermind could be the King if he was a ruthless person who had no qualms with using his daughters as political chess pieces. But the chances of that were low.
Aside from the king, a person who had the most to gain from this incident would have to be a highly influential noble.

But those with close relations to the royal family had no incentives to do so either. It was doubtful that they would gain anything from the King's downfall.
For those reasons, the person who stood to gain the most from this incident was neither the King nor any of the nobles associated with the King.

But as far as Rio was concerned, he was caught in a political dispute between nobles.

(This is no joke.)

Rio had a delirious smile in his mind.

An influential noble lost in the power struggle this time and was using all their efforts to forcefully extract a confession from Rio while the winning side was against it. As long as the losing side held their suspicions, Rio would not be released.
That kind of suspicion would be very difficult to clear.
The interrogator remained paranoid throughout the interrogation and continued questioning Rio. If things did not go well, faking his confession was a possibility.

(If I can fabricate a confession that makes the losing side's influence fall, there's a chance I can get out of this alive.)

But he could not run away.

"Who did you receive orders from? It was a lower class noble's child wasn't it? You've actually received combat training right?"

Without growing tired, the interrogator continued to question Rio.
Carrying a stick, the interrogator tried to provoke him by hitting him

on the cheek.

“…Peh.”

Rio spat out a mix of blood and saliva at the interrogator.
He could feel a bit of his resentment wash away.
Even if showing defiance to such a degree would not change his fate.
Without a command from his superiors, the interrogator could not kill Rio.

“…YOU~!”

Enraged, the interrogator roared at Rio. At that moment, the cell door opened.
Seeing the man who just entered, the interrogator immediately stood up straight.

“Your Excellency Deputy Commander! Thi-This is…”
“Be at ease. How is his condition?”

The man who just entered was known as Alfred Emal.
He was the second son of the Emal household tasked with protecting royalty and the court.
Entering the cell, Alfred waved his hand at the interrogator and the interrogator muttered something to Alfred. He then turned his gaze towards Rio.

“Ha~. As I thought, even with a bit of force he won’t say anything. Such a rebellious attitude. With that kind of mental fortitude, I really wonder if he’s just a child.”

Alfred his hand on his mouth as he listened to those words.

“Because that… Your Excellency Deputy Commander?”

Judging by his expression, it seemed the interrogator wanted to ask something.

“The commander is busy at the moment so I came in his stead.”

Hearing those words, Alfred was slightly shocked.
The interrogator explained the situation and Alfred directed his gaze

at Rio.

“Hmph. Are you really the orphan who rescued Hime-sama?”
“…”

Alfred’s voice resounded within the cell.
Even though he was still relatively young at only around his late-20s, he could release killing intent no ordinary person could endure.
But Rio just ignored his question.

“Insolence!”

Shouting, an imperial guard standing beside Alfred closed in and struck Rio.
Rio shifted his body as much as possible to lessen the impact of the strike and directed an icy glare at the knight.

“…”

When their eyes met, the guard involuntarily flinched.

“Interesting, even I can’t make this vagrant youngster speak.”

Alfred looked at Rio while evaluating him. The two stared at each other.

“I see…”

After staring at each other for a while, Alfred muttered in a low voice as if he realised something.

“Fumu, take this boy to the training grounds.”
“Roger! Right away, sir. Move!”

Following that, the interrogator yanked the chain attached to the choker on Rio’s neck and handed the chain the imperial guard.
Rio did not put up any resistance but he was still roughly pulled along by the guard.

The jail was located in the basement but the training grounds were above ground.
The appearance of the Bertram Kingdom Royal Palace, surrounded by sturdy stone walls was a small yet stunning castle constructed

from fine white bricks.
The ugly but pragmatic stone walls were erected to withstand external assaults.
Exquisite pieces of art and ornaments lined the halls of the castle.
Rio was walking in a wide corridor with regularly set columns on either side and lush, vermillion coloured carpet laid on the floor.

On the way, castle guards and servants eyed him curiously.
The knight leading him ignored them and continued guiding him.

(Just like a monkey exhibit, huh. No this is even worse than that.)

They looked at Rio with discerning eyes mixed with sympathy and contempt.
The occasional high class civilians he passed in the halls displayed similar expressions.
When he met the onlookers' gazes, they averted their eyes.

"We've arrived."

And like that, Rio was brought to the training grounds.
Nobles and their knights serving the Kingdom gathered around as spectators to observe the spectacle.
Rio was passed a training sword and made to stand in the center of the training grounds to face a knight.
Rio could not comprehend why he was forced to fight, but he had no other choice but to go with the flow of things.
Right now, he only needed to focus on how to defeat the opponent in front of him.
Fortunately the handcuffs obstructing his magical powers were already removed.
If worst came to worst, he could use body reinforcement to force his way through the gate.
But escape could wait until after the duel.
So he only needed to end this match peacefully.

Taking a stance with his training sword, his opponent was an imperial guard equipped with light metal armour and a buckler.
He looked down at Rio with one of eyes.
Even when provoked by the imperial guard to make the first move, Rio did not move from his position. Rio silently observed the

opponent in front of him.

The imperial guard could feel Rio was not a normal opponent, especially from his peculiar sword stance.
Facing the imperial guard, Rio was not at all intimidated.
Annoyingly clicking his tongue, the guard decided to go on the offensive.

“HAAAAAA!!!”

Swiftly closing the distance separating them, he released a blow with all his might in order to crush Rio. The guard skillfully weaved the training sword. At the current rate if the blow connected with Rio’s body, it would not end with just an injury.
Sensing the approaching danger, Rio decided it would be best to avoid the attack.
He dodged the blow by nimbly side-stepping.

The guard’s face twisted in astonishment while the spectators were aghast at what just transpired.
Without missing the chance, Rio used minimal amounts of magical power to strengthen his physical abilities and muscles and instantly pointed the tip of his training sword at the Imperial Guard’s neck.
Silence filled the area.

“Wa-Wait! I was unprepared! He just got lucky! I’ll get serious next time!”

The Imperial Guard started to panic as he blurted out flimsy excuses.
Looking at his unsightly appearance, the silence was replaced by roars of laughter.

“…YOU! Don’t tell me you’re making excuses for losing to a kid. What a disgrace for an Imperial Guard. This kind of blunder is inexcusable.”

A loud voice resounded from the crowd of spectators. The voice belonged to one of the nobles who was watching the mock battle from the corner of the training grounds.

“Y-Yes! As Duke Euguno said, it’s outrageous for an Imperial Guard

to be making excuses like that.”

The surrounding nobles murmured in agreement. On the other hand, isolated groups of nobles lost interest in the display and bit their lips while listening to the speech.
Rio remained expressionless at the spectacle unfolding before him.

“Fool! Cool your head! Your negligence was the cause of your loss. As an honourable member of the Imperial Guards, obediently accept your defeat.”

Alfred admonished the Imperial Guard who was facing Rio.
As one would expect of one being reprimanded by the Deputy Commander, the Imperial Guard vexedly repented and lowered his head.

Alfred directed his attention to Rio. After seemingly being lost in thought for a bit while observing Rio, Alfred opened his mouth.

“Fu~n, splendid! Boy, this is proof that you really were the one who rescued Christina-sama and Flora-sama.”
“What do you mean by that?”

Rio daringly asked Alfred without hesitation.

“Oh, I was just personally relaying His Majesty’s gratitude. It is a great honour for you to receive His Majesty’s thanks. A room will be made available for you. You’re free from prison now.”

Using His authority, Rio was completely one-sidedly cornered.
The King was an absolute existence held in awe by all.
It was that kind of feeling.
The King had not said anything ever since Rio left prison.

“…I’m honoured.”

Rio’s nonchalant reply made Alfred furrow his eyebrows. He then looked at Rio and said,

“Fu~n, anyway you may head to your prepared room now. A magician has been arranged to examine and treat your injuries.”
“Thank you very much.”

The ones responsible for putting Rio in such a miserable state was under Alfred's command in the first place. He was unhappy at the fact but for the time being he expressed his gratitude.

Thus Rio was released from jail.
After accepting treatment for his injuries, he was guided to his room for a bath. There he was greeted by an older girl serving as his caretaker.
She was still in her teens.
But the beauty the girl boasted would make even renowned artists hesitate to bet their life to try and accurately reproduce her elegance.
"Beautiful" was the only word that could be used to describe her.
The girl quietly entered the room and bowed to him.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Aria Gavness. I am an apprentice maid working in the Royal Castle and have been appointed as Rio-sama's caretaker. Please take care of me."

Arira said that with a blank face like a Noh mask.
It was a clear voice with no hesitation.

"Why thank you, for you to display such courtesy to someone as lowly as myself. I'm Rio."

Bowing respectfully without being distracted by the maid's unbelievable beauty, Rio politely greeted her in return.
If the other party acted courteously, then Rio would also respond in a courteous manner.
An eye for an eye, a favour for a favour; that was what Rio believed.
He did not know the etiquette of the country but from the way he returned the greeting, a very small hint of surprise sparked in Aria's eyes.
Unless one had very keen observation skills, they would have missed it. But Rio noticed it.
It seemed like behind the Noh mask, Aria was not totally expressionless.

"I will be serving as Rio-sama's attendant during your time at the Royal Castle. If you need anything, please do not hesitate to call for me."

But Aria was also acted quite professionally; she did not pry for any information about Rio.

“Then tell me one thing. After meeting His Majesty the King tomorrow, will I immediately get kicked out of the castle?”
“I am sorry. But I don’t know anything regarding that. I only know you have an audience with His Majesty the King tomorrow. I was ordered to take care of Rio-sama for the time being.”

In other words, there was the possibility that he would be placed under house arrest after the audience.
Hearing the reply he had predicted made him despair.
But at least when compared to his former jail cell, his current accommodation was a large improvement.

“I see. Thank you for telling me.”
“No need, it is my duty to inform you of such matters. If you don’t have any more questions, shall I bring your meal?”
“That’d be wonderful. By all means, please do.”

After suffering through numerous days being served inadequate meals, Rio displayed a smile befitting of his age.

(It’s not all that bad after all. I get to eat luxurious meals instead of receiving a reward.)

While entertaining difficult thoughts, Rio headed towards the Royal Court kitchen.

Chapter 5
Audience

A few hours after Rio's mock battle.
The Imperial Guard Commander Helmut Albo was receiving a severe reprimand from the current King of the Bertram Kingdom, King Philip III.

"Your Majesty! I believe it is necessary to perform further investigations on that boy! Please grant me your approval!"
"Rejected. To begin with, the mock battle from before was performed to prove he truly was the one who defeated the kidnappers. Did we not already agree on the fact that orphan was indeed my daughters' saviour?"

Philip III spoke to Helmut in a forceful tone but Helmut could not accept the King's response.

"Of course. But it's strange a mere orphan can not only defeat four bandits but also win against an Imperial Guard! He most likely received combat training from somewhere!"

Helmut felt anger mounting against Philip III.
To the desperate Helmut, the King could only show a bitter smile while hiding his true intentions.
He was fully aware of Rio's unnatural strength.
However he did not want to dig deeper into the subject due to having other goals.

"Isn't that strange, Helmut. Then what do you make of that mock battle with the Imperial Guard? If my memory serves me right, you were the one who arranged the fight between him and the Imperial Guard to gauge his abilities and determine if he really was the one who defeated the four ruffians."

Philip III pointed out a contradiction in Helmut's words. But Helmut immediately stated another assumption.

"Indeed he won against the Imperial Guard; I agree that serves as proof that he really was the one who rescued both Hime-sama. But the one he won against was an IMPERIAL GUARD! An orphan whose age hasn't even reached 10 yet! It's too strange!"

Deliberately agreeing with the King that Rio was strong, Helmut admitted that fact.
Rio possessed abilities no mere orphan could obtain.
Even though the Imperial Guard did show an opening for an instant, there was no way a kid younger than 10 could have snatched victory from such a small window of opportunity.
Normally that kind of thing would be impossible was what Helmut was trying to say to the King.

But in this case, the situation was convenient for Philip III.
It was because Helmut's influence in the Royal Palace had grown too large.

He had become a nuisance to the King.
When Christina and Flora were kidnapped, the ones in charge of their protection in the Royal Palace were the Imperial Guards.
It was a huge blow to the Imperial Guard's reputation.
Naturally the fault fell onto Helmut as the Commander of the Imperial Guards.

And now Helmut was in a predicament.
He was desperately trying to prevent his downfall using all means available to him.
The he could succeed was if he found out who the mastermind was.

He knew very well the mastermind behind the incident was targeting him.
But this scheme was too vile. The mastermind left absolutely no trail.
Their only lead was the four kidnappers but before any useful information could be extracted from them, they were poisoned to death.
The jailers guarding the kidnappers were all sentenced to death but nothing really came out of it.

The only connection left was the orphan who rescued Christina and Flora.
At the time, the mastermind left Rio alone because he did not know anything.

When Helmut noticed the situation he could not keep himself calm and forced an investigation on Rio using all authority he had.
By using all means necessary.
Even a spec of information would be fine if it could lead to the mastermind.

The time limit was three days because Helmut would be court-martialed after that.
So he carried out interrogations over the three days but Rio did not know anything.
For his achievement of rescuing royalty, they were not permitted to use any violent methods during interrogation.
However the clock was ticking and Helmut defied orders and applied more forceful methods.
Unfortunately for Helmut, they still could not elicit any information from Rio.

Along with the interrogations, as a last resort Helmut arranged a mock battle between Rio and an Imperial Guard but that also failed.
He had the two fight because he still doubted Rio's abilities.
An orphan who should not know anything about combat was able to defeat the Royal Family's kidnappers.
Helmut refused to believe such an absurd report.
Christina and Flora testified that Rio was their saviour but it did not erase the possibility of someone helping him from the shadows.
Helmut's train of thought was approaching the realm of delusions.

Even if he insisted that Rio was weak, he could not refute the credibility of the princesses' testimonies.
So to gain approval for his conjecture, the duel was held in front of the King and nobles.
The result was too much for Helmut.
Rio won against the Imperial Guard barely even moving from his initial position.
Everyone present was dumbfounded.

Helmut had glanced over at his old nemesis Duke Euguno. Noticing his stare, Duke Euguno displayed a sarcastic smile.

Helmut knew.
That man knew about Rio, about his abnormal strength.
So he did not interfere with the duel allowing Helmut to lose face.
That person. He was undoubtedly the mastermind. Helmut wholeheartedly believed in his delusions.

And so all those events finally culminated in the current situation where his words no longer reached Philip III.
Helmut knew it was his defeat.
He was aware the King's words were absolute.
He was beaten and no longer had any chances at overturning his loss.
Yet his still struggled in vain.

"Feats of valour must be rewarded even if he is only an orphan. You claim he is the subordinate of a noble. Do you have any evidence?"

Hearing the words of Philip III, Helmet displayed a sour expression.

"…there's no evidence proving his innocence either."

Philip III knitted his brow in annoyance at Helmut's rude conduct.
If Rio was present he would most likely be shouting 'You must be joking!'.

"So you want to torture him to make him speak? Even when it's not clear if he has any connections with the mastermind? Even as a joke I shall not allow a benefactor of the Royal Family to receive such treatment!"

Without trying to hide the irritation in his voice, Philip III said so in a sullen mood.
Even though Philip III clearly displayed his irritation, Helmut still ran his mouth in desperation.

"Helmut, enough… In the first place, was it not due to the carelessness of your guards that my daughters were kidnapped? In the case of emergencies Imperial Guards are to become shields for royalty, yet now they even lost to some no name kid. Who would

have thought the Imperial Guards would suffer such disgrace."

Philip III's words instantly shut up Helmut from spewing any more of his delusions.

"Tha-That is…"

Helmut could not come back with a counter argument.
He was cornered.
For him to reach his current position, it took a tremendous amount of effort.
Helmut was a greedy and ambitious man.

There were two knight divisions in the Bertram Kingdom.
The Kingdom Knights served as the core of the regular army and served to protect the country while the Imperial Guards exclusively served the Royal Family and court.
The total number of knights active in the Kingdom numbered 6000, 90% of them were affiliated with the Kingdom Knights with the remaining were Imperial Guards.
The knights and mages serving as knights held considerable power and influence just falling short of that of nobles.
The selection process was harsh because anyone regardless of social position was allowed to apply. In only one generation, a nobody could receive peerage of a knight and overnight have their name included amongst the nobles.
In other words, becoming a knight was a gateway to nobility. It also held the highest employment rate for nobles.
As noted before, there were two possible paths in knighthood, Kingdom Knights or Imperial Guards.
So what made them different?
It was the hierarchy of their members.
The rank of Kingdom nobles from lowest to highest were as follows: knight, mage, baronet, baron, viscount, count, marquis, and duke.
Among senior knights and mages, only a small handful were granted higher nobility while the others could only ever reach viscount or count.
Only nobles who were counts or higher in rank received their own territory in the Kingdom. Lower nobles and knights received a small portion of a higher noble's land to help govern.

Members of the Kingdom Knights primarily composed of commoners and lower class nobles. On the other hand, the Imperial Guards comprised of mainly lower to upper class nobles.
It was due to Helmut taking command of the Imperial Guards that this distinction was created.
Previously, the King was the one who led the Imperial Guards.
However, Helmut shrewdly wrested control of the Imperial Guards from the previous King.
During the time he served the former King, he put on a front appearing as a loyal and devoted knight.
The former King was fooled and appointed him as commander of the Imperial Guards.
Helmut finally revealed his true colours when the former King was on his deathbed.
Until the time Philip III ascended the throne, Helmut abused his authority as Imperial Guard Commander to sell Imperial Guard positions to sons and daughters of powerful nobles.
As a result, Helmut successfully built a formidable faction in the Royal Court.
He was only a knight yet he held immense political influence.
His influence became too large for Philip III to ignore.

(Just a bit more! A bit more and I could've become General! The whole country's army would've fallen under my hands! That's how things should've gone!)

Helmut's ultimate goal was to snatch the position of highest authority from the King by having the Army under his control.
At that point Helmut's influence would surpass even that of the King's.

However, Helmut made a fatal mistake and as a result his influence plummeted.
Due to his greed, he made a great number of enemies along the way.
The number of nobles who felt jealousy and animosity towards him were not few in number.
There were many cases where nobles fell from power and were forced out of the court due to Helmut's actions.

Personally, Philip III could not forgive whoever tried kidnapping his daughters but he could not pass up the golden opportunity of dealing a crushing blow to Helmut's political influence.

"The Imperial Guards have been on a decline since some time ago. I think this incident is the perfect example why a reform is needed."

Fortunately this incident gave Philip III an excuse to resolve the problems in the Imperial Guards. He finally raised himself slowly.

"From now on, the selection of Imperial Guards is restored under the authority of the King. As punishment, I hereby strip you of your position as Imperial Guard Commander. In the meantime, Alfred will serve as acting commander of the Imperial Guards."

And with that declaration, Helmut was deprived of his powers by Philip III. It meant Helmut lost his position in the Royal Court and must leave the palace.

(Kuh, one day, I will definitely return one day! I'll show that damned Euguno…)

While harbouring a deep grudge, he bowed.
However when he looked up, dark emotions swirled in his eyes.

"I will humbly obey Your Majesty's will. However, it is a fact that the mastermind of the incident has not been found yet. Just in case, it is my duty to make preparations against the situation."

Helmut responded without any changes to his facial expressions, as expected of a high class noble with a long military record.

"The chances of that orphan having connections with the mastermind aren't zero. It's safer to kill him than to let him live in the Kingdom."

Helmut hinted about the potential dangers of Rio.
Philip III also held concerns regarding the matter.

"Fumu. Thank you for your concern. I still need to understand that child's true nature. Therefore I will keep for your warning in mind with regards to his treatment. As for the reward, I've been thinking of bestowing him the rank of knight, for a 7 year old it should be more

than enough huh…”

Helmut displayed a look of disbelief when he heard Rio was to be promoted to knight.

“But this is unprecedented treatment for a seven year old boy. If he is to become a knight, he requires corresponding education.”
“I understand your concern. That is why until he reaches the age of 12, I will have him enroll in the Royal Institute as a scholarship student to receive the required education. What happens after that will depend on him.”
“If that’s the case… I guess that seems reasonable. Management can be left to the Institute’s instructors.”
“Aah~”

While thinking about the strange existence known as Rio, Philip III puzzled over the complicated situation.
He speculated the aim of the kidnapping was to weaken Helmut’s influence.
With inside help, the kidnapping could easily be carried out; it did not mean the bodyguards were irresponsible.
It could not be helped since Helmut had many enemies, not just the mastermind.
Such a ruthless person.

It was possible the mastermind never intended to put Christina and Flora’s lives in danger, but Philip III could not forgive anyone who used his cute daughters.
In fact Christina only suffered some minor injuries, but they were injuries nonetheless.
However it was true that he was angered by his daughters’ kidnappings and the incident clouded his judgement as a ruler. Philip III needed to calmly determine the mastermind.
The mastermind was probably not foolish enough to take action so soon though.
He guessed from now on things would become more hectic in the court, Philip III secretly sighed.

* * *

The next day, prior to the audience, Rio groomed himself in preparation.
The forelocks which reached his lips were cut revealing a face brimming with youth.

Rio was close to Amakawa Haruto in appearance, but not exactly.
It was more a mix of his current and former self.
His black hair was a rare sight in the Bertram Kingdom and was considered foreign.

He looked like a totally different person from the boy who performed the mock battle against the Imperial Guard the other day.
Many people sitting in audience sent looks of awe and admiration at Rio.
Being the center of attention, Rio lowered his head in embarrassment while waiting for the King to speak.

Aria already drilled into his head the required etiquette for the audience.
Though it was still far from perfect, many nobles were amazed at the way he walked. He was only an orphan yet he carried himself with astounding dignity.
Still, there were some who sneered at him.
Before long the Royal Family finally gathered, and the audience began.

“Rio, come forward!”
“Yes!”

Obtaining permission from the King, Rio raised his head.
Seated on the throne on the stage was King Philip III. A bit further down sat the Queen along with the princesses, Christina and Flora.
Christina and Flora were astonished at Rio’s drastic change in appearance.

“For rescuing my daughters and displaying a valiant heart, I offer my most heartfelt thanks.”
“By Your Grace, I am extremely honoured.”

Bowing his head deeply, Rio responded in a flat tone.

“Hou~. Your manners are quite polished. Where did you learn such etiquette?”
“Manners are already engraved into my body. I asked the court lady last night to teach me so that I may not blaspheme royalty.”

Hearing those words, Philip III looked at Rio in admiration.

“I see. That is an admirable attitude. Very well-behaved for one who is only 7 years old. I am deeply interested in your upbringing.”

Philip III looked at Rio with gentle eyes.
Mixing a sigh and curse in his mind, Rio replied respectfully with a smile.

“Yes. I was born and raised in this city.”
“Hou~. To think you were raised in my Kingdom. What about your parents?”

One way or another, Philip III still held suspicions that Rio was a spy from another country.
But after hearing that Rio was brought up in his Kingdom, he became curious.
Of course, he still would not just take Rio’s words at face value.
Which was why Philip III inquired about Rio’s parents.

“Yes. My father and mother were adventurers from another country. During their travels, they stopped in this Kingdom to give birth to me. My father died while out on a quest and my mother died when I was 5 years old. After that… I lived by myself in the slums.”

Rio grimaced a bit recalling the moments before his mother’s death.
Philip III assumed something happened to Rio in the past that he was unwilling to talk about.

“That is regrettable… It must have been painful for you. Judging from the colour of your hair, I think you and your parents’ origin is from a Kingdom far in the East.”
“Yes. I heard that my father and mother originally came from a place in the Yagumo area.”
“Hou~. Yagumo huh… Is that not the name of the Eastern-most Kingdom in that area? Your heritage is from a very distant land.”

“Yes. I will one day return.”
“Hmm… I see. By the way, for rescuing my daughters, I was thinking of rewarding you but—”

Halting mid-sentence, Philip III sent a gaze at Rio.

“That’s right. I will grant you entry to the Royal Institute as a scholarship student. If you wish, you will also receive an appropriate position after graduating. If your performance in the Institute is good, I will also support your enrollment for higher education.”

The contents of Rio’s reward were revealed.
To receive education in this society, an orphan like Rio could not hope for better.
Though from Rio’s knowledge, the wealthy class played a major role in society’s development.
As a representative of commoners, he was reluctant to attend the Institute.
But he could not refuse the reward as it would be disrespectful to the King.
As long as he did not have a suitable reason, he could not turn down the offer. That was what Rio learned from Aria before coming to the audience.

“I express my sincere gratitude. Even though I do not believe someone like me is worthy of such a reward, I accept your generosity.”

The moment before Rio accepted his reward, he determined the advantages and disadvantages in an instant.
Incidentally, the Bertram Royal Institute was where the wealthy children of the Kingdom gathered.
The student body mainly consisted of nobles’ children but kids of wealthy merchants were also present.
The Institute included dorm facilities for its students to ease their commute.
The school curriculum was divided into six years of elementary education, three years of intermediate education, and two years of higher education.
Students were required to be at least 12 years old to partake in

intermediate education and at least 15 years old for higher education.
The 7 year old Rio was eligible to attend the elementary course of the Institute. He was not required to take the admission exam thanks to receiving a recommendation and scholarship from the King.

It was decided Rio would start attending school in the middle of the year.
With the exception of Rio, only royalty would usually be allowed to receive scholarships. In almost over a thousand years of Bertram Kingdom's history, the situation rarely ever occurred.
The nobles in particular raised their voices in surprise, but no one dared defy Philip III's decision.

It should be noted that the level of education in the Kingdom was exceedingly low when compared to Japan.
More than 90% of commoners could not read or write save for the remaining wealthy 10%. At best, lower class nobles did not exceed the elementary education level.
As the only education institute in the Kingdom, Royal Institute graduates had an education level slightly higher than elementary level, but the Royal Institute was not a charity.

Entry to the Royal Institute cost 1 mystic coin with an additional yearly tuition of 10 gold coins. In short, the total cost for studying until graduation was 3 mystic and 10 gold coins[11].
Other than wealthy merchants, famous lower nobles, and high class nobles, who could afford to pay that kind of money?
In addition, Rio also received 40 cold coins as a bonus reward as well as an additional 10 gold coins every year until his graduation from the elementary course.
By the way, the yearly income for a lower class noble was 40 gold coins.

And thus, several days later, Rio was admitted into the Royal Institute.

Notes

1. Exchange rate: 100 copper = 1 silver, 50 silver = 1 gold, 25 gold = 1 mystic

Chapter 6
Enrollment

Two months have passed since the start of the first term in Bertram Kingdom's Royal Institute.
Since Rio was entering in the middle of the term, it was only natural that he became the centre of attention.
It was arranged for Rio to be introduced in the first home room.

"Starting today I will be studying together with everyone in this class. My name is Rio. Please take care of me for the next six years."
In a flat tone, Rio introduced himself without hesitation.

"A transfer student in the middle of the term?"
"He doesn't have a family name. He must be a commoner."
"Why is a commoner entering in the middle of the term?"
"From what I heard, he's the orphan who rescued Christina-sama from danger. Enrolling in the Royal Institute on His Majesty's recommendation was his reward."
"An orphan? And thanks to that, this kind of guy is enrolling in the Royal Institute?"

No applause came.
Instead, the sound of murmurings could be heard from the students who were evaluating him. Their eyes gathered on Rio.
A tinge of hatred surfaced, this seven year old kid already tainted the place for nobles to study.

As for the kids of high class nobles who served in the royal castle, they already knew about this beforehand.

Naturally they also knew that Rio was an orphan and were looking at Rio as if witnessing a strange animal. It was understandable since they all came from a privileged class.
As for Rio himself, he already expected that things would turn out

like this.
With his facial expression completely calm and serene, Rio surveyed the entire class.
From the looks of it, he judged that there were over 100 people in the room.

Classes 1 to 3, each class consisted of 100 students[11].
It was very clear that the population was divided by social status with a distinct wall between nobles and commoners.
The noble class was further hierarchized. School regulations dictated that discrimination based on social status and connections were not allowed but judging from the classroom's atmosphere, it was clear that it was only a façade.

(Well by creating relationships during the time at the institute, once you graduate you will have a large number of connections. N…?)

Suddenly, Rio's gaze rested on a familiar face.
The person sat in the far corner of the classroom.
Around her were students from high pedigree sending despising gazes towards Rio.
When her line of sight matched with Rio, Christina pouted her lips in displeasure.
It seems that she hates me quite a bit; Rio thought that while cynically laughing in his mind.
He also had no intentions to involve himself with Christina.
If she hated him, it will only be more convenient.

"Fumu, any questions? …so there aren't any. Yosh. Rio. You can sit at that empty seat. Basically you can sit wherever you want but I recommend you sit there for now. That's all."
"Understood."

The lecturer standing beside Rio simply said so and urged Rio to sit. Rio who also preferred to not stand any longer in front of the class quickly moved to the empty seat.
Thus Rio's life in the Royal Institute began.
There were four classes in a day with an hour for each class.

But problem arose in the very first class.

And that was math class.

“Well. Okay, let’s see. Rio the transfer student. Please solve this problem.”

Said the lecturer in charge of the current class. Each class had a different lecturer.

The one in charge of math class was a considerably young lecturer.
If it was in Japan, she would be around the age of an upper grade elementary schooler.
However she was actually closer to that of a junior high schooler but her appearance betrayed her.
Rio was asked to solve a problem that could be compared to a first grade elementary school problem in Japan which anyone could solve.
Unfortunately Rio did not understand what was written.

“E~~tto, sorry but I can’t read the numbers written.”

Rio could not read numbers.
And, following that was a moment of silence followed by bursts of laughter.

“Oi oi. Enrolling in the Royal Institute but not being able to read.”
“To share the same class with this lowly fellow who can’t even read numbers…”
“A~, that’s right. He didn’t take admission test.”
“I can’t accept such a lowlife. He’s also stupid.”

The class remembered he was of the same age and began to immerse themselves in a sense of superiority.
Their ridicule of Rio could be heard from all directions.

“I see, so you can’t read. You haven’t been taught that. …All right. I’ll give you extra lessons afterward. Please come to my laboratory afterschool. For today just listen to the lecture and if you don’t understand please ask.”

She said that while shaking her head at disbelief of Rio’s lack of education.

“Understood.”

Rio then decided to accept the advice given to him and listened to the lesson.

“Nee~, you.”

A voice called out to Rio after math class.
Looking at the one who called him, he saw the perfect example of an Ojou-sama standing in front of a crowd of her fans.
Rio noticed that they were the group who were sitting around Christina.

“Yes, what is it?”
“What is it? Well, I’m sorry. What did you mean in the previous class?”
“Huh? No. What about the previous class?”

The girl showed an expression as if lamenting for Rio.

“What about it? It’s about you who can’t even read numbers. In this prestigious Royal Institute, especially when you’re enrolled in the same class as Christina-sama and myself, for a monkey like you to be mixed in it.”

Apparently Rio received a complaint from this girl. Sighing both in his mind and out loud, he gave an answer to the one raising the complaint against him.

“Sorry, but I’m illiterate.”

It was true that he was illiterate in this world.
These sorts of rotten people would only increase after knowing about this.
The kind of person who tells it to him flatly would be the most decent.
Up until now, thanks to the people from the privileged class, he developed some kind of stress resistance and gained more than enough of an understanding towards this world’s society.
“Since you’re entering in the middle of term, I had expected that you have already learned the four basic math calculations [2] so I’m extremely disappointed.”

The girl was staring at Rio with disdain in her eyes.

“Really. I assumed you’d be a bit poor when compared to Her Highness Princess Christina and a daughter of Duke Fonsyn, but I still had some expectations from you.”

Apparently the leader of the group’s name was Roana.
Many students standing near Roana started agreeing with her.

“Not being able to read numbers made me laugh quite a bit. No, I already expected that.”

A boy spat out that line while pointing at Rio and looking at him with a ridiculing expression.

“Haa~. With this, my expectations for another class have been shattered.”

Said Roana sighing.

“First you should question yourself as to why you are even allowed to be sitting in this place. If you are aware of how blessed you are to be here, then burn it into your mind since it’s obvious that you don’t belong here.”
“Understood. Roana-sama. Thank you for your consideration.”

Rio said that while lowering his head.
Seeing that, Roana was left agape for a bit admiring his manners.

“Ara, it looks like you at least have some courtesy. All right then. You just need to be more diligent since it’s also my responsibility as class representative along with Christina-sama to help you. Besides, it’s a noble’s duty to lead the commoner.”

“Thank you very much.”

As if it was a natural thing, Roana said it with an expression full of confidence.

That must be her true feelings.

“As expected of Roana-sama.”

Her fans started agreeing with her immediately.

Suddenly, they noticed Rio was looking at them with a smirk on his face. Somehow it was like he was grateful that their self-esteem was lower than his own.
Rio already knew Roana's fans had wicked minds.

"Next is history class but you also can't read right? It's frustrating that even with great effort, you'll only be able to catch up a little bit. "

After saying that, Roana returned to her seat.
And before long the next lecturer came.
As expected, Rio could not write nor read the letters on the blackboard. As such he did not even attempt to open his notebook and spent the time trying to memorize the contents of the lecture.

And thus, the last class of the day was martial arts practice.
Training in martial arts and magic was done together, but for the elementary grade, the martial arts training was not too rigorous as it would be harmful to their bodies.
For the first year in the elementary course, students only needed to familiarize themselves with a wide variety of weapons and armour.

"Now, today we will be learning about different types of swords. We will do one set for 10 minutes and a sufficient break will be given afterwards. You will be practising the sword stance that I taught in the previous lesson. Then, let's start with three sets. HA!"

After saying that, the students dispersed and began mimicking the sword stance with wooden swords in hand.
Upon finishing his instructions, the teacher came to a stop in front of Rio.

"Rio. Since your progress is behind everyone else, I will personally teach you the sword stance. Come here."

Following the teacher's instruction, Rio separated himself from the rest of the students.

"You, can you show me how you hold your sword?"
"Yes. At once."
"Hmm, I see. Then, I will first check your stance. Try to hit me once with that sword. Come whenever you ready."

Right after saying that, the teacher readied his stance.
Seeing that, Rio thought that it was a practical stance without any openings forged through experience.
In the meantime he was seeing if he could find any openings in the teacher's stance.
Perhaps it would be an easy win if he strengthened his blow with magic by using physical and body reinforcement.

He began to feel uneasy due his grade not being taught magic yet.
But it was already known that he rescued Christina and Flora so it would not be unusual even if he showed his true strength.
In the end, he decided against using flesh reinforcement and physical reinforcement so that he could gauge his ability without relying on it.
Deciding to limit his ability, Rio readied his sword stance.

"Is that self-taught stance?"

Looking at his beautiful stance made the teacher wonder and ask Rio.

"…No"

"I thought so because of how you hold your sword. I see. You have talent."

Right after the teacher said that, Rio charged at him.
After closing the distance, Rio released a blow while also watching his opponent's sword.

"Hou~. Good swordsmanship. You won't strain your wrist like that."

The teacher said that while reacting to Rio's sword. Looking at Rio and holding his sword with one hand, he blocked the incoming strike.
As expected of a teacher with a sharp observation, by saying that it meant that Rio surpassed his expectations.
It was difficult for Rio to hide the full extent of his ability using only basic swordsmanship.
Well, it was fine if it was only that much.
But, he already determined to not go all out so he had to limit himself.

"Umu~. Good! Rio, you're suited to become a knight!"

While warding off Rio, the teacher proclaimed with a smile. Nothing can be done about his hot-bloodedness. Honestly, it was a bit stifling.

“Unfortunately I am not interested in becoming a knight.”
“Why? That’s fine, your time here has just started. Don’t worry, I will train you the way a knight fights.”
“!!!?”

Suddenly a sharp blow was released against Rio by the teacher.

“Hou~. Now how did you fend off that blow? “
“Wasn’t it that Sensei wouldn’t attack me…?”
“There is no need to abide to such rule! I know that you’re skilled enough. Good, once again.”

The teacher swung his sword again.
Moreover he was also trying to knock away Rio’s sword.

“In terms of power and speed, generally it’s a perfect score for basic ability… Extremely fine movements. …Well, this institute teaches this kingdom’s swordsmanship which is very different style. Where did you learn such a style? “
“From my deceased mother.”

Rio stated the most convenient explanation that came to his mind.

“I see… I’m sorry. You must be practicing it quite a lot.”
“Yes.”

Rio answered back indifferently.

“Well your basic swordsmanship is very solid. To the point that you won’t experience any negative effects even if you learn this kingdom’s swordsmanship style. I’ll reshape your stance.”

It was decided that Rio would learn swordsmanship afterschool.

(N?)

When he was about to return, Rio suddenly felt as if someone was watching him.
Looking over, he could see Roana and Christina.

When Christina and Rio’s eyes met, she quickly averted her gaze but Roana became rock solid with a look of disbelief.
He wondered if he was being watched the whole time.

It was not like it was a big deal so what was the matter?
Rio was slightly confused.
But since he had no time to worry about such trivial things, Rio continued his sword stance training.

Notes

1. Three classes per year, each consisting of around 100 students

2. Addition, subtraction, multiplication, division

Chapter 7
Magic

After school.
As Rio was called by his math lecturer to visit her after school ended, he currently stood in front of his lecturer's laboratory room.
The laboratory was located in one of the library's basement rooms.
Rio knocked on the laboratory door.

"…"

There was no reply.
He tried knocking again.
This time loud noises could be heard from the other side of the door.
Alas there was still no reply.

(Is anyone inside?)

Rio knocked again this time applying more strength.

"Pardon me. Sensei!"
"Da—! Sorry for making you wait! This place looks a bit better now! Y-You're Rio right? What is it?"[11]

By the way, Rio was almost hit in the forehead by the opening door.
It was due to his superb reflexes that he managed to avoid it.
What appeared in front of him was a beautiful young girl elegantly drinking tea by the window.
So surreal was the scene before him that he was left momentarily stunned.

"Ah— yes. Today during class, Sensei told me to come after school ended to receive supplementary lessons."
"Aah—, I see. It must have been very difficult for you today. I was concerned about the extent of your knowledge. I only wanted to see

where you stood, but ended up humiliating you as a result."

She said that while making an apologetic expression.
Rio did not react to the regretful looking teacher.

"Ah, no. It is only natural that Sensei would be interested in the extent of a scholarship student's knowledge. Actually it is I who must apologize for taking up Sensei's valuable time to tutor me."

The girl's eyes widened hearing Rio's answer.

"Heh~. Despite being a commoner's child, you're very clever for a child your age aren't you? Are you really 7 years old?"
"Yes I am. Say Sensei, you're also considerably young aren't you? I was surprised someone as young as you is a lecturer."
"Is that so? I'm already 12 years old. Well the truth is I'm barely at the age where I can graduate from the elementary course. It's just that I skipped a few grades so I've actually already graduated from the advanced curriculum."

Thanks to Rio's flattery the girl became more attentive and talkative.

"Truthfully, while I'd like to only concentrate on my research, lecturing in my spare time allows me to take a breather."

Wrapped in a robe, she proudly puffed her chest. Rio was a little amused at her action.

"That's really impressive."
"Ehehe~ Ah, you just transferred in so I haven't had a chance to introduce myself yet. I'm Seria[2]. Seria Claire. I'm of noble descent but I dislike formalities so it's fine to act as you usually would."
"Yes, my name is Rio. A pleasure to meet you."
"Hai~ Hai~[3] Best regards to you too Rio. Anyway don't just stand there, please come in."

Seria beckoned Rio to enter.

(S-So messy…)

He instantly did a double take seeing the chaotic state the room was in.

“Ah, it’s a bit messy. Here, you can sit on this chair.”

(…a bit?)

There was something very wrong with that statement but he pretended not to notice.
As Rio took a seat, Seria pulled out a sheet of paper and laid it on the desk.

“Well then, first off, do you know what numbers are?”
“I do.”
“Fu~n, then there are eight books. You finish reading six of them. How many books have you yet to read?”

Seria threw a simple math problem at Rio for him to solve.

“Two.”

Rio replied immediately.

“Ara, you can perform mental arithmetic? How about addition?”

Receiving the unexpected reply, Seria asked Rio.
In this world, commoners could not even perform simple arithmetic without aids.

“Yes, I can.”
“Okay then how about this?”

Seria wrote the same question on paper but this time in numerical form.

“I don’t know, what is that?”

Since Rio was unable to read he could not understand the formulas written.

“E~tto… So you can do calculations but not read numbers?”
“That is correct.”

“Oh my, what a bizarre combination… I guess it’s not impossible. Commoners usually can’t afford paper after all…”

Seria looked at Rio with a tinge of shock.

“Alright, I’ll teach you numbers for the time being. I’ll write down the numbers 1 to 9. Please memorize them.”

With that said, Seria quickly wrote the numbers down.
Written numbers were not difficult.
Staring at them, Rio only needed a few dozen seconds to memorize all of them.
“I’ve finished memorizing them.”
“Eh, already? Then please write down the number 1 to 9.”

Turning the paper over, Seria passed it over to Rio.
Rio accurately wrote down the numbers.

“Correct. Furthermore such elegant handwriting…”
“Um… can you please show me the number zero[14] so I can use it for my calculations?”
“…you understand the concept of zero? To be knowledgeable of ideograms[15], numbers, and arithmetic… right. …This.”

Rio requested Seria to write it down on paper so he could memorize it.

“So that’s how it is. Thank you very much. Anymore more than this I’ll be wasting Seria-sensei’s time. Is it fine for me to take this sheet?”

Because Seria looked like she was in the middle of something and his business with her was done, he thought it would be best for him to leave.

“Wa-Wait a minute! You can take the paper but can I have a look at it before that? Ah, I also wanted to write down some practice question so don’t leave yet!”

Rio faltered due to Seria leaning her body over too closely.
Taking out a new sheet, Seria quickly jotted down some problems.
There were fifty problems in all composing of the four basic calculations.

“Then please start.”

Briefly scanning through the contents, Rio understood that the

problems were extremely simple.
He finished all of them in a mere span of 5 minutes.
Watching him breeze through the problems only served to increase Seria's shock.

"I'm done."

Seria immediately started checking his answers upon receiving the paper.
She did not need to check over every answer to know the results of his exercise.

"All the answers are correct…"

While saying that, a bitter smile floated on Seria's face.

"Well it's only this level of math. Everyone in class can do this much right?"

At Rio's words, Seria could no longer hold back her laughter.

"Ha, haha… haha… Indeed some of them can do this much. But you know, only a few students in your grade can manage this much. Besides, none of them even come close to matching your mental arithmetic skills."

Only then did Rio notice.
Even among nobles, only those with decent academic abilities were sent to school.
In fact, it was a way of boasting about their children's intellect.
If that was the case then it was no wonder that Rio was misunderstood.

"Hah… things will become troublesome soon…"

Feeling annoyed, Rio prepared to rise from his seat.

"It's okay. I have time so don't worry about it. Let's talk for a bit."

Seria firmly held down Rio's shoulders to prevent him from leaving.
The pleasant scent of flowers tickled Rio's nose.

"You were an orphan living in the slums until just recently right?"

Rumours of his background seemed to have already reached the ears of the teaching staff.

“Yes, I was.”

There was no reason to hide the fact so Rio answered her honestly.

“It’s not because I’m looking down on you but to speak so gracefully as well as already mastering basic arithmetic, just how? How is that possible?”
Seria continued speaking faster with an excited tone.
Apart from the lovely smile befitting for her age, her intensity made it hard for him to refuse her.

“E~tto, I studied very diligently so that I may be able to speak properly during my time at the Royal Institute. My mother spoke very formally and I used her as a reference for my own speech. She was also the one who taught me basic arithmetic saying it would become useful in the future.”

Of course, it was a lie.
Except the part about learning how to speak from his mother was true.
In Rio’s memories, his mother spoke in a beautiful manner unfit for an adventurer.
He nostalgically remembered being scolded whenever he used foul language.
It was from his mother that he was able to develop a polite way of talking.
But the part about learning math from his mother was a complete lie.
There was no way he could say he learned it from his former life.
Rio decided to lie with an unchanging expression.

“Ah I see, so it was from your deceased mother. Is it possible that she was formerly a noble? Regardless, she was a fine person. I’m sorry for asking.”

Feeling a sense of guilt for bringing up the topic of Rio’s deceased mother, Seria’s mood became apologetic.

“It’s alright. I’ve already sorted out my feelings regarding the matter.”

“But something like that… Haa~, I guess it’s alright. You’re surprisingly mature for your age.”

Seria was not fully convinced by Rio’s words.
But she felt wrong to dig up Rio’s past so she did not bring it up again.
It seemed she was quite a caring person.

(So nobles like her do exist…)

All the nobles he had met until now displayed considerable arrogance thus shaping Rio’s bias towards them.
However exceptions like Seria existed.

“Seria-sensei is also very mature.”
“Eh, ara, that so? —I see. Rio can tell?”

Apparently Rio’s words were favourably received.

(She’s unexpectedly easy to handle…)

Rio could not help but feel that way seeing just how moved she was.

“Errr… anyway, leaving that issue aside, regarding your arithmetic skills, you just jumped to the top of the class. Quite unexpected considering just a while ago you couldn’t even read numbers.”

Returning to the original topic, Seria became serious again.

“Do you even need to attend anymore math lessons? Since you’ll only encounter similar topics for the next three years in the elementary course anyway.”

All Royal Institute lectures were optional for the sake of noble pupils who were often absent due to their duties.
Even so not all of them were like that; the diligent ones still attended class.

“Haha, that would be bad. I’d be antagonized by the other students.”

He would not be seen in a very good light if he did not show up for class.

“Ah~ I understand. That would indeed be troublesome. Relationships

would be an issue, especially among the nobles.”

Perhaps recalling the hassles of aristocracy, a displeased look formed on Seria’s face.

“Isn’t Sensei a noble too?”
“I guess so…”

Feeling dejected, Seria’s expression and tone crumbled.
Her posture grew sloppy causing her thin white limbs to be exposed. They exuded an alluring charm unbefitting for her age.
In the quiet secluded room, the usual young lady was not seen. Honestly, the disparity between her appearances was too intense.
Her almost completely rolled up skirt was a dangerous temptation for Rio.

“By the way Sensei, you said that your research focus was magic but on what specifically?”

The vulnerable Seria was relieved to hear Rio change the topic.

“Ara, are you interested in magic?”
“I am.”

When Rio responded affirmatively, Seria retrieved a clear transparent crystal with complicated geometrical patterns etched into it from a nearby shelf.
From the moment Seria laid hands on it, white light was released from the crystal.

“E~tto, this is?”

Looking at it, Rio asked about the crystal placed on the desk.
The moment Seria let go of the crystal, it stopped emitting light.

“This determines an individual’s aptitude for magic; a magical tool called Spirit Light Crystal. The geometric patterns are carved directly onto its surface. It’s a unique artifact so it’s quite expensive.”
“A magic stone?”
“Magic stones are a substance held by monsters in their bodies. It’s said to be the core of a monster; it’s what caused them to bee morphed into such abnormal beasts. When they die, they don’t leave

anything behind except these magic stones… According to another theory, labyrinths are said to be the birthplace of monsters.”
“Monsters, magic stones, labyrinths…”

They were interesting words he did not fully understand the concepts of; only knowing their names Rio muttered them.

“Ah, our conversation has strayed from the original topic. Anyway, the Spirit Light Crystal reacts to magical power that comes in contact with its surface. It will shine even with minimal magical power applied. It’s also known as the Measurement Stone.”

Seria explained its name and effect.
All humans possessed magical power, but the amount varied from person to person.
There were few people who could not use magic at all due to having insufficient amounts of magical power.
This magical tool was used to judge if a person had the requirements.

“You will know what type of magic you excel at from the colour of the light. For a magician, it determines their affinity.”

Hearing Seria’s words, Rio looked that crystal with deep interest.
Setting aside the process of determining one’s magic aptitude, why was such a round-about method used to examine whether someone had magical powers or not?
Rio found it very odd.

“Hee~, so magical powers can’t be seen by the naked eye?”

Rio thought the magical powers he saw as light emitting from other people could be normally seen by the eyes.
Therefore he questioned the Measurement Stone’s usefulness.
Indirectly asking about his doubt, Rio focused his eyes on Seria.
There were many students in the Royal Institute who were gifted with an abundance of magical powers but the light surrounding Seria was considerably bright.
By the way, after a little practice, Rio was able to switch perception of the light on and off at will.
The trick was to cover his eyes with magical power.

“Pure magical power can be vaguely felt but is not visible to the naked eye. However during magic invocation, light from the magic can be seen.”

(…Strange. Then what is the pale light I’m seeing? Only I can see it? The feeling of this light too… what is it?)

“Look! Let’s try it out.”

Seria urged him to touch the crystal and white light started emitting from it.

(The same as Seria-sensei’s. Shining white. Does it visualize magical power? White light shown from the crystal the moment I lay my hands on it. As far as I’m concerned, the pale white light I’m seeing is magical power?)

He analyzed it calmly in his head.
Beside him, Seria was staring at the light emitting from the crystal with her eyes slightly coloured in astonishment.

“Oh it’s glowing! Moreover a white colour indicates an all-rounder type! That colour means you’re able to use any kind of magic as long as you master control over your magical power! It’s the same as me! People who radiate white light are very scarce.”

Seria was laughing and smiling next to Rio.
As for the types of magicians, other than mages there were fighters. Mages were red while fighters radiated blue.

“E~tto, thank you very much. All-rounder type? Somehow I don’t really understand this feeling.”
“Well, you’re not able to sense magic yet. Magic perception, magic control, and the Contract Ceremony are required to use magic.”
“I see. What needs to be done so I can perceive magic?”
“The simplest way is having another person transmit their magical power into your body; a sense of discomfort should arise, although some people don’t feel anything. You will need to learn how to control that magical power afterwards.”
“I see. Sorry but I have another question, but what is the Contract Ceremony?”

For the sake of dispelling his doubt, he asked for an explanation on another unfamiliar keyword[6].

“N~, to say the general definition, the Contract Ceremony is a ritual where you brand your body with a phrase in order to interfere with the laws of nature. It’s a bit troublesome but it’s the most efficient method. The start will be a bit dull since it’s just magic perception theory, but as the class advances we’ll move onto the Contract Ceremony. So please look forward to it.”

Notes

1. She speaks in a formal tone albeit a bit quirky

2. Editor: セリア can also be romanized as ‘Celia’

3. A cute/childish way of saying okay, something akin to okeydokey

4. There is no zero in Roman numerals

5. A written symbol representing an idea (i.e. ‘&’ means ‘and’)

6. Refers to Contract Ceremony

Chapter 8
Failure

Five months have passed since Rio entered the Royal Institute.
Currently, Rio had become the target of bullying.
On his first day, he was not able to read letters or numbers resulting in him becoming the subject of ridicule.
But by reading books in the library, he taught himself how to read letters and remarkably was able to catch up with the rest of the class.

In the first place, he was a University student in his past life.
With the exception of the common sense in this world, as expected there were almost no issues.
Even though it would seem like Rio's progress suddenly sky-rocketed, the person himself faked a gradual learning curve in order to avoid attention.
It could not be helped since he was aware of his circumstances; nobody knew his true level of intellect.
By the time he caught up with the rest of his classmates, Rio's grades placed amongst the top ranked students.

None of the surrounding students expressed any interest at all.
Those with childish pride satisfied themselves by continuing to look down on him, while others who previously saw him as a failure still saw him as one.
All the more since he was formerly an orphan.

However Rio did not intend to interact with other students either so he had no connections with anybody in his class.
Rio only used the Institute as a place for acquiring knowledge about the world; that was all.

Since the surrounding students continued to ignore him, he led a

lonely school life. Not that it mattered because he was already used to being alone during University in his former life.
Rio did not form bonds with any students as he did not need their help for any of his school work. He was not bothered by the degree of ignorance he received from the students either.
It seemed there were various slanders made behind his back due to their envy of his results.

However an event that allowed the surrounding students to openly express their resentment finally occurred in magic class.
When the time came where he could perceive magic, Rio was finally allowed to perform the Contract Ceremony.
The steps to performing the System Contract[11] were very simple.
A geometrical pattern called the magic formation was drawn on the ground; the contractor then stands on top of it whilst meditating while releasing magical power and chanting an incantation.
If the contract is successful, the magic formation drawn on the ground disappears and becomes engraved on the contractor's body instead.
The contract formation's pattern increases in complexity proportional to the rank of the magic.

"I did it! I was able to do it!"
"Oh that's just the elementary class magic <Ignition>[12]. It's to be expected that you'd succeed. There never has been a case where someone failed."

Lectures were carried out about different types of magicians[13] by different lecturers.
Because Rio was an all-rounder type, he had to attend lectures from both sides.

The nearby students raised their voices in glee as they succeeded their Contract Ceremonies.
Unfortunately, Rio had yet to succeed in performing a contract.

(Why? This is… I understand the procedure yet for some reason… Contract attempts keep failing.)

Rio was puzzled.

When he stood on the magic formation and channelled magical power into it to create the contract, he somehow acquired an understanding about the details of the magic.
However before the contract could complete, his body rejected it.

One person, two persons, the students who successfully completed the contract continued to increase.
Until only Rio was left.
The astute among them quickly picked up on that.

“Oi, that Rio can’t complete his contract!”

Eyes of many students practising their magic in high-spirits gathered on Rio.
There was a large distinction between those who could use magic and those who could not.
This became increasingly clear during war where magic users became the leading actors.
Even if they did not approach the front lines, magic users still gained that kind of prestige.
In addition, those who awakened to their magical prowess gained longer lasting youth.
That was why many among the privileged class learned magic as a testimony to their status.
It was due to such a reason that the Royal Institute incorporated magic into their curriculum as a mandatory subject.
And because the amount of magical power is inherited from a child’s parents, noble children were sent to school in search of potential marriage partners. Therefore for most students, it was necessary for them to attend lectures pertaining to magic.

Recently, the other students could not stomach the former orphan who stole the top academic ranks yet could not complete the Contract Ceremony.
Now an excuse emerged for them to openly ridicule Rio. It was definitely a blessing for the ones try to hold in their disgust.
Magic can only be wielded by the chosen few; being an all-rounder type was a lie; a former orphan is still an orphan after all. They happily jeered at him.
Eventually, they would think the Spirit Light Stone malfunctioned; Rio

was not fit for the Royal Institute; Rio's outstanding academic performance was a fraud, and so they went on saying these malicious things.
The lecturer tried to control the situation but was ignored and the students continued whispering criticisms against Rio.
Ever since that day, Rio had not been able to succeed in the Contract Ceremony.

"Rio, come to my lab room after school."

Rio was called by Seria after the math lecture ended.
After school, he headed towards the laboratory room.

"Excuse me."

He often chatted with Seria so it was not unusual for him to come by her laboratory room.
Rio enjoyed talking with Seria because somehow their wavelengths matched allowing them to converse naturally.

"Good, you came. I heard. You weren't able to perform the Contract Ceremony?"
"I'm afraid so."

Seria jumped straight to the main topic when Rio entered the room.
The reason was because Rio often answered her straight-forward questions.
Somehow or another she picked up the story about him failing his contract.

"You're able to perceive magic right?"
"Yes."

Seria put her hand to her chin entering into deep thought after Rio replied.
When she assumed this posture, Rio understood she would become unresponsive to anything he said so he waited in silence.

"…For example, the elementary magic spells <Ignition> and <Create Water>, you weren't able to complete their contracts right?"
"Regrettably yes."

He shrugged his shoulders while answering Seria's question.
Probably because magic did not exist in his former world, he did not feel it was absolutely necessary to be able to use it. Yet there was still a lingering desire to try the unknown.
Therefore he felt disappointed about his current situation.

"…It's strange. I think the cause for your failure is… is because you can't control your magical power? No, because an elementary magic spell only requires magic perception to succeed…"

Seria grumbled to herself while lying face down.

"I'm sorry. I can't determine the cause of your failure."

After organising her thoughts, Seria raised her head and apologised in vexation.

"I don't mind. Besides we still haven't established the fact that the contract is impossible so I can take heart in that fact for now."
"I see, well, even though I don't understand, I'll still hear you out and provide as much advice as possible."
"Thank you very much. By the way, what kind of sensation do you feel when the Contract Ceremony succeeds?"

Rio immediately raised a question.
He was still anxious about the contract.

"Sensation? Nn~ let's see. It feels like something flows into your body and it becomes hot after that?"

Seria answered Rio with uncertainty.
"Will you understand the contents of the contract?"
"Understand the contents of the contract? What do you mean?"
"E~tto, how to say it, the phenomenon of how the magic spell is able to interfere with the laws of nature[141]?"

Rio thought back to when he was performing the contract and tried to simplify his explanation as much as possible.

"Why ask? Well it's okay, there's no reason why I shouldn't understand. If magic research advances more I will understand. I mean, that is my research topic."

(Am I strange? I can see that she doesn't understand me… isn't this bad?"

Rio knew he could not provide an answer for Seria and instantly recognised the danger of his careless question.
Many humans in this world believed in religious deities.
It was common knowledge that magic was a sacred power bestowed onto the human race by Gods.
Only by performing the Contract Ceremony would they come to an understanding about the contents of that sacred power.
The pious believer— no, the general population of believers would treat him as a heretic if he slipped up.

"Is that so? I think I can use your ideas as a reference to understand the sense of a completed contract."

Rio could not talk about what he truly felt to Seria.
It did not mean he did not trust Seria, just that he needed to investigate the matter a bit further.

"I'm sorry I couldn't serve as a reference."
"No, I understand it even if just a little bit. About how each person senses it. I'm sorry for saying some odd things."
"Well that… it was an interesting point of view. The feeling when the contract is completed. I haven't thought much about it either. It would be interesting to perform a survey about that…"

By hearing Rio's words, Seria had a flash of inspiration.
Once again, she displayed an expression of deep interest and immersed herself in her own world.

(She really is a researcher at heart.)

Rio could only smile wryly at Seria's state.

"Ah, I'm sorry. I tend to get carried away whenever I begin thinking about something."

Seria laughed bashfully with a flushed face.

"Not at all, because I was able to get a glimpse of Sensei's lovely face."

“Na— ba-baka!”

Seria’s face reddened in embarrassment.
Somehow, she seemed weak against jokes.

“T-That kind of thing, is Rio okay with it? Your classmates are quite awful; they’re cheerfully insulting and mocking you. Are you by any chance being bullied?”

Rio felt that Seria was trying to change the subject. Though from her question, she seemed genuinely worried about him.

“Thank you for worrying about me but there aren’t any problems in particular.”

Rio felt happy about her concern so he answered in a way not to cause her any worry.

“Rio has a really dry sense of humour unsuited for his age… Are you really alright?”

Seria asked once more to make sure.

“Should I say I’m bullied? The degree of bullying is still that of a cute child. I can just ignore it. It’s only some badmouthing behind my back.”
“That, so it’s just teasing. Ha~ so the bullying done by nobles is quite lousy.”

Seria roughly scratched her head.

“I think Rio’s intelligence is similar to mine. You instantly absorbed everything I taught you and your academic results rose at an unbelievable rate too.”

Seria suddenly said that with a serious expression.

“You think too highly of me. …Anyone could do the same if they put in the effort.”

Seria thought Rio was intelligent but it was only thanks to him retaining knowledge from his previous life, Rio thought so.

“I know Rio puts in the effort. You’re always up late studying in the

library.”

Saying that, Seria had a heart-warming expression while tenderly looking at Rio.

“But you know, it’s natural to make an effort. There doesn’t exist a genius who doesn’t make an effort. People become intelligent simply because they put in the effort. They put in the effort because they are intelligent [5] . That’s how it is. That’s why Rio is smart. As someone who is praised as a genius, I can guarantee that.”
“That is… I am honoured. Thank you very much.”
“Yes. You’re welcome. It’s only that, I’m worried about Rio.”

Saying that, Seria’s expression darkened a little.

“There are many nobles in the Institute. Won’t they instantly compare themselves to you? They’ll become jealous since you surpassed them. Rio is clever so I don’t believe that you’re one to and bottle everything up… right?”

Seria said that with a bashful face causing Rio to smile slightly.

“Thank you for worrying about me. I assure you I’m fine. Look at it this way; I can face my stress because an understanding person is here to support me. Besides, I have the nerves to shamelessly complain to you if needed.”
“A seven year old is telling me how to deal with stress…”

Seria was astonished but still smiled while saying that.

“Well it’s no good this time so please allow me to rely on you Seria-sensei.”

And Rio looked at Seria with a mischievous smile.
Seria broke into a wide smile when she saw Rio acting like that.

“Alright. I’ll lend you my chest this time.”

She opened her arms in order to embrace him with her small body.

“Well, since Seria-sensei is very small, I’ll have to lower my body to be held by you right?”
“Na!? Very small you say! I’m still growing!”

“Haha, I know. You’re still only 12 years old.”
“I— I feel like I’m being treated as a child by someone who’s younger than me…”

Seria tasted a strange sense of defeat.
They laughed together and thus the day ended.

Then the next day Rio came to school, he noticed the bullying had escalated to a new level.
The desk he usually sat at was vandalised with many cuts and scratches on its surface from what seemed like a knife.
In addition, a flower was placed on the desk.
This flower was usually offered to the dead in the Bertram Kingdom, it was definitely not something to be given to the living.

It seemed they were finally using a more tangible method of bullying.
Yesterday’s magic lecture acted as the trigger.
To perform something as tasteless as this, Rio was amazed at the level of hatred they harboured.

He looked at the condition of his desk and chair, and then surveyed the surrounding students.
Some of them averted their eyes but most of them were sneering and laughing at him.
Those whose families were of higher ranked nobles were particularly nasty.
They did not bother to try and hide their contempt.
By chance, when Rio caught the eyes of Christina and Roana seated near the group of higher ranked nobles, they avoided his gaze with sullen expressions.
Before long the lecturer entered the classroom and noticed disastrous state of Rio’s desk.

“O-Oi, what happened to that desk?”

When the lecturer noticed the meaning behind the flower placed on the desk, he became perplexed and asked the students about the situation.

“Since that’s where Rio always sits, wouldn’t he be the culprit?”

The one that said so was one of Roana's fans.

"Is that so?"

Hearing that the lecturer turned to Rio.

"No. The desk was already in that condition when I arrived this morning."
"Is that the truth?"

The lecturer stared at Rio doubtfully.
To be frank, he did not care about it but it would not be amusing if he was falsely accused.
He intended to get back at them with a bit of revenge—

"Why would I vandalise my own seat? Furthermore, I know that according to the Kingdom's laws, destroying public property is a criminal act and the offender will be lashed and fined as punishment."

Rio spoke his defence without faltering.

"However I truly doubt the students of the prestigious Royal Institute would ever commit such tasteless acts. Surely it must have been a stray goblin? It is a serious issue if a goblin has infiltrated the school. A request should be submitted to reinforce the city guards."

He made himself more convincing by maintaining a serious expression throughout his talk.

"Mu, t-that… right…"

The lecturer's face cramped up after hearing Rio's reasoning.
It was not that the lecturer did not trust Rio. He could already guess who the offender was but he did not want to provoke the high ranked noble families.
Therefore he placed his doubts on Rio but the answer he received far exceeded his expectations.

It could be said that the goblin was the most well-known monster in this world.
It was the weakest amongst monsters, possessing low intelligence

but strong sexual desires.
To compare a human against a goblin was considered the greatest insult.
Although Rio did say it was the work of a goblin, it was clearly the deed of a human.
He refused to acknowledge the culprit to be a student within the Institute but kept insisting a goblin was behind the misdeed.
It was all just sophistry but he dared to ridicule the culprit.

As if admitting he was the culprit, a student glared at Rio with a scornful expression as if he could no longer stand Rio's presence.
But he could not rebut Rio either.
It would be equivalent to openly admitting his fault.
Improvisation by considering every possibility, it was a truly intricate retaliation.

The lecturer felt that he accidentally awoke a sleeping dragon.
When Rio looked around the classroom, as expected, a number of students belonging to senior nobility were cursing Rio to death.
Perhaps they were the culprits.

"…Sorry, Rio please move to another seat. I will collect the flower after lecture."
"Understood."

The lecturer decided to quickly begin the lecture to avoid any more trouble.
Rio seated himself at a vacant desk as he was told.
After the lecture, a number of students deliberately slandered Rio so that others could also hear.
They talked about how Rio failed the Contract Ceremony; the mocking atmosphere returned to the classroom.
Others who were unhappy about Rio immediately joined in.

Rio on the other hand simply ignored them.
It was a childish relationship that would last until graduation.
He had better things to think about such as why the Contract Ceremony failed and other things involving magic.

He could strengthen his physical abilities and body with magical power.

Yet he could not complete the contract.

Rio currently only held a snippet of knowledge pertaining to magic.

First, he could see magical power with eyes.
Second, he could strengthen his physical abilities and body with magical power.
Third, when performing the Contract Ceremony, he could understand how the magic spell interfered with the laws of nature.
Fourth, for some reason right before the magic formation can engrave itself into his body, it was rejected.
Fifth, even though he could perceive the magic carved into the magic formation, he could not understand its contents.

From those facts alone, Rio was unable to deduce the reason for why the Contract Ceremony failed.
But if he could not complete the Contract Ceremony, he would be unable to use magic, was what Rio thought.
Because he had to understand the method of invoking magic through the magic spell.
Then he should be able to use magic if he imitated those principles.
It did not take long until he arrived at that conclusion.

If humans who were able to use magic were considered the hardware, then the software would be the magic spell.
Rio recognised magic as such.
Then the Contract Ceremony would be the software; he felt like he was misinterpreting something that could not be expressed by words.
Certainly, by using a magic spell one could intervene with the laws of nature.
But he was missing one crucial piece of the software.
That was what Rio thought.
However, he did not know what he was missing.

To begin with, he already had too many abnormalities.
It may be unnecessary for him to try conforming to the norm.
Maybe he could use magic without a contract. He would no longer have to be concerned about being unable to complete the Contract Ceremony.

Rio optimistically thought it was something like that.
He just needed to prove his theory now.
Rio intended to replicate it by recalling the flow of magical power from the magic formation.

Notes

1. Refer to Glossary

2. Read as Ignition, written as Ignition Magic

3. Two main types: mage and fighting

4. Physics, chemistry, etc.

5. http://www.peterubel.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/circular-reasoning1.jpg

Chapter 9
Growth

Time flew by; it has been five years since Rio was admitted to the Royal Institute.
The twelve year old Rio was now a sixth grade student in the elementary course.
Ever since the time Rio transferred in, he continued to face opposition which continued until now.
Furthermore, the level of bullying escalated proportionally to his grade.

They said that, since he was unable to complete the Contract Ceremony even once, he became the first failure in the history of the Royal Institute.
They said that, his outstanding academic scores were a fraud.
They said that, he was performing immoral acts with female students.
They said that, he extorted money from his juniors.

With the exception of the claim about the Contract Ceremony, all the other claims were baseless rumours without any evidence.
But the Institute left the rumours alone doing nothing to dispel them.
Rio did not understand why they chose to do so but it was a trivial matter for him.
Therefore Rio ignored the rumours and did nothing to refute them.
The person himself had no intentions of doing anything about it.
As a result, Rio was left without any friends due to those rumours.
Amongst the students, he was known as the most prominent problem child in all of the Royal Institute's history.

By the way, the number of electives students could take increased as they progressed to the upper grades of the elementary course.

While many of the young noble students chose liberal arts as their electives, Rio preferred electives that could satisfy his intellectual curiosity.

“Okay, let’s begin with the introduction of magic theory. As many of you already know, I will be in charge of this class for the year. Frankly because you’ve had limited exposure to magic theory up until now, many students may find the contents of this class to be challenging, but since you’re all here it must mean that you’re interested in this topic.”

Seria was in charge of the overview of magic theory class which was one of the electives Rio chose.
Even though she was already 17 years old, her body stopped growing when it reached the level of a junior high school student.
The elective was unpopular among the students due to magic theory being impractical and insignificant. The only reason why some students selected the elective was because a genius was in charge of the lectures.
On the other hand, there were a handful of male students who chose the elective because they were charmed by the lecturer’s appearance.
There were 30 students in the class including Rio.
Christina and Roana were among the students as well as Flora who was one grade below them.

“First off, what is magic? How do we invoke magic? These are the two main topics we’ll be focusing on. Does anyone want to share their thoughts on what magic is? How about Princess Christina?”
“Yes. It’s a technique used to interfere with the laws of nature and create various phenomena.”

Christina answered in a plain tone.

“Ooh, to already start with such a great answer. As expected of Her Highness the Princess.”

Hearing Seria’s praise, the surrounding students sent Christina

respectful glances with expressions as if to say “as expected of Christina”.

“Magic can be defined from various viewpoints. What Princess Christina just said is the definition focusing on the nature and essence of magic. Magic is a technique used to interfere with the laws of nature and create various phenomena. This definition is from the book written by renowned magician Zera-sama.”

The students displayed interest at Seria’s words.

“Now there’s also another commonly accepted definition focusing on the invocation of magic. I wonder if everybody knows about the process of invoking magic. Let’s see, Scott?”

Called by Seria, the student by the name of Scott confidently stood up.

“Yes. Magic is invoked by reciting the incantation learned during the Contract Ceremony.”
“Nn~, you confused the preparation stage with the invocation stage. Then, next is Roana-san.”

Knowing that his answer was incorrect, Scott regretfully sat down again.
Being chosen, Roana stood up from her seat.

“Yes. The process is divided into several major steps: creating a mental image of the magic spell, releasing magical power, and chanting the incantation. These three steps provide the basis of the invocation process.”

Roana answered without hesitation.

“As expected of Roana-san. As you said, there are 3 steps in invoking magic. However, there is one important concept supporting the 3. Do you know what it is?”

“That is… I don’t know.”

Not knowing the answer, she displayed a regretful expression and pouted her lips.

“I see, then how about you Rio?”
“It’s control of magical power.”
“Correct. As expected.”

The subtle sounds of students clicking their tongues could be heard in the class.
Rio knew something that Roana did not.
They were unable to stomach that fact.
Hearing those sounds, Seria could only sigh in her mind and continued with her lecture.

“Unexpectedly, no one was paying attention but control of magical power is the crux of magic. When invoking magic, everyone chants the incantation from the contract right? During that time, you are subconsciously controlling your magical power.”

Other than Rio, it was the first time everybody heard about that. Each one of them displayed a look brimming with curiosity.

“Control of magical power isn’t the only important thing during the process of invoking magic.
To control it, it is also necessary to know the class of magic. Why do you think there are magic spells that cannot be contracted by people? Control of magical power is closely related to that.”

The students in the class were keenly listening to Seria’s explanation.

“Sensei!”

Raising his hand along with shouting in a loud voice, a boy broke the silence in the classroom.

“Yes, Stead.”

Seria turned her attention towards the student named Stead who raised his hand.

“In other words, the ones who aren’t able to complete the Contract Ceremony have poor control over their magical power right?”

Stead looked at Rio and displayed a mocking smile.
Many other students did the same.
Rio ignored them and with a calm expression, continued focusing on the front of the class.
On the other hand, Seria slightly frowned.

“…That way of talking is too extreme. Also, your language is unacceptable.”
“Forgive me. I will be careful. Thank you for telling me.”

Even though he was rebuked by Seria, Stead sat down with a satisfied look.

“Alright, let us resume the lecture. In the first place…”

After that, Seria’s lecture progressed smoothly without any problems and lecture ended in a flash.

“As expected of Seria-sensei! It is worthy for a genius like yourself to have your name go down in the Royal Institute’s history. I’m greatly impressed by your deep insight.”

When the lesson ended, Stead approached Seria and began complimenting her.
Stead was a student one year below Rio, the son of a Duke’s house.

“Ahaha. Thank you.”

Seria thanked him with a strained smile.
During that time, Rio quickly finished packing his bag and prepared

to leave class.

“Ah, Rio.”

Noticing him, Seria called out to him.

“Oi, commoner. Even though you can’t use magic, why are you taking this lecture when the only skills you possess are mere lip service and cheap tricks? You’re a despicable bastard who endangers the chastity of the women and girls in this class.”

However, someone’s voice rebutted Stead’s words.
Seria stepped forward and positioned herself between Rio and Stead.

“I don’t know what you’ve been told but he is free to choose any elective he wants.”

For Rio, this kind of trouble was a daily occurrence and he chose to ignore it as usual.

“Hmph, you lowly bastard, I’ll remember your face commoner, so you better start running away in fear. I’ve misunderstood you before so treat this as a warning.”
“What do you mean?”
“Che. Such insolence, are you pretending not to hear me? Don’t delude yourself, wasn’t it thanks to your underhanded tricks that you were able to enroll in the Royal Institute? In the end a commoner will always remain a commoner, an idiot that will slow us down, a nuisance.”

He was among one of the boys who clicked their tongues earlier, to whom Rio retorted.

“I understand. Then I will try my best to not stand out in this lecture from now on.”
“N? Ha, haha, what the hell did you say? I’m saying from now on don’t come to this lecture anymore, you.”

Shi~n, the classroom became dead silent.
The surrounding students gave Rio icy stares.
In the midst of that, Christina was acting as if the situation had nothing to do with her, Flora was nervously fidgeting, and Roana was pouting; they had all heard Rio's conversation.

"I heard that you've been deceiving and harming the girls. You're an existence that cannot be overlooked."

Social status, lineage, prestige, wealth.
All noble girls sought marriage partners based on those conditions.
Since birth, noble girls were obligated to search for a suitable marriage partner.

But, around the age of twelve, it was the age when girls started developing interests in the opposite sex.
At this age, it was a fact that they were more interested in physical appearances than practical qualifications.
Even noble girls were not exempt from that fact.

Rio still possessed a boyish innocence, yet his androgynous [11] appearance became more refined over the years.
To sum it up, his uncommon black hair gave him an exotic atmosphere.
As a result, the noble girls often made advances on Rio because it gave them the feeling of playing with fire.
Rio ignored all the girls who approached him.
Jealousy ignited in the other male students and they began spreading baseless rumours about Rio.

Convinced the things he heard were true, Stead accused Rio of perpetrating the contents of the rumours.
Never once doubting that Rio was the enemy of all women.
Even if they were just rumours, Rio found it disgusting.

"Hey. Stead, you're a noble, so don't accuse someone without any evidence."

Having watched the scene unfold, Seria intervened.

“But…”

With the appearance of Seria, Stead held back what he wanted to say.

“Even if Rio is that sort of person, as a lecturer and as long as I still draw breath, I shall not allow that sort of behaviour in the classroom.”

She clearly stated.
Stead reluctantly withdrew after hearing that.

“…I will abide to your words. …but remember this commoner. You’ve just made yourself an enemy of my parents’ house, Duke Euguno’s house.”
“I’ll keep that in mind.”

After saying that, Rio bowed to Seria and left the classroom.
Rio signalled to meet Seria after school by giving her a wry smile. It was a sign only known to the two of them.
After school, Rio arrived at Seria’s laboratory room.

“Seriously, they’re detestable as usual.”
“Well, I’m more or less already accustomed to it.”

Rio smiled bitterly while tasting the black tea.
By the way, it was Rio who brewed the tea.
The reason being Seria claimed Rio was better at brewing tea than she was. Thus whenever they chatted in the laboratory room, Rio was the one who brewed the tea.

“In the past, I was also bullied due to jealousy from my peers, but Rio’s situation is much more severe. Anyhow, they’re spreading rumours about you because the girls are interested in you?”

Seria said that while watching for a reaction from Rio.

“It’s because I’m not interested.”

Hearing the words from the unsociable person in front of her, Seria could only sigh.

“Isn’t there a chance for a reverse-Cinderella[2]?”
“I highly doubt it. Their house would never allow it even if I associated with them.”

Rio kept his calm judgement to the bitter end.
Judging from his demeanor, Seria thought he was truly uninterested.

“Well, ne~…”

While nodding half-heartedly, Seria wondered why Rio was so obstinate.
For anyone his age, the interest in the opposite sex could not be quelled so easily.
Despite that, this boy was indifferent.

(Don’t tell me he prefers…)[3]

One possibility hit Seria.
However she did not know of such a person.
To begin with, Rio had no friends in the Institute.

(I’m the only one he talks to.)

Rio did not have anyone to talk to besides Seria.
As for Seria herself, she felt that he was feigning ignorance from the talk just now.
Other than during lectures, mealtime, and sleep, Rio was either studying in the library or independently training outside.
Whenever she saw him, he was alone.
With the exception of herself, there were no traces of any women near him.

Whenever she saw him, Seria would always call out to him. In her mind, she saw herself as close friends with Rio.
Therefore she did not think he thought about her in any special way.
Seria had already discarded such an outrageous possibility.

(Or maybe he's just ignorant. There's plenty of evidence pointing to this. I can't see any other possibilities.)

When Seria's eyes moved towards the front, she saw Rio elegantly drinking tea with the refined movements of an educated noble.
Honestly, he became odious to the point that he looked attractive.

(I'm the only one who sees you like this. What will you do after you graduate? I'm wondering because you never tell me anything. Geez, you can talk to me. I'm worried you know.)

Worried about Rio's future, Seria decided to ask him directly.

"You know, Rio only has one more year before graduation. Have you decided what you will do afterwards?"
"Ah that's right. I'll being staying in the Kingdom for now but, I'll be going on a journey in the not too distant future."
"EH! You're leaving the Kingdom?"

Seria was shocked at Rio's words.
Certainly she never expected him to leave the Kingdom.
Due to his outstanding martial arts grades, she thought surely he would aim at becoming a knight.

"Well, it's difficult for me to stay in this Kingdom."
"…Ne~, why don't you work as my assistant in my lab? I can't survive without you anymore."

Seria said that while surveying the room.
It has been 5 years since she first met Rio.
Initially, Rio found the mess in Seria's laboratory room intolerable.
However, after coming to the laboratory room so many times, Rio voluntarily offered to clean up the mess.

As a result, Seria was astonished at Rio's housekeeping skills.
Nowadays, he not only tidied up her room but also brewed her tea and assisted in her research.

"As a noble, isn't Seria-sensei also at the age where marriage talks should be happening? It's not good for you to have a suspicious commoner in your room."

Hearing the words "marriage", Sera became dejected.

"I— don't want to think of marriage at the moment. I've refused all marriage proposals thus far to focus on my research but it's getting noisy back home."
"I think Seria-sensei is free to decide when to marry, isn't that okay…? Since… you're already at a marriageable age."[14]

Though Rio thought otherwise, it was common knowledge that the marriageable age for nobles were in the second half of their teens.
And currently, Seria was pushing past the marriageable age bracket.
However, Seria was an exceptional woman with both social status and remarkable achievements. Even if her age were to exceed twenty years old, it would not be difficult for her to find a marriage partner.

"Aah—! I might get left behind! Oh dear, I wonder what the men of this Kingdom will think when a woman exceeds 20…"

But it seemed like Seria was quite worried about her age and marriage potential.

"Well, personally I think the marriage age for noble women is too young. Seria-sensei is 17 years old forever[15]."
"Forever 17… Wha— that, it doesn't sound too bad."

Seeing her murmur to herself, Rio thought she looked cute. Rio started brewing more tea after seeing that the teapot was empty.
He already knew Seria's preferences.

After associating with her for many years, he knew Seria was very particular about her black tea. Rio could boast his tea brewing skills were on par with a butler.
It was good enough to satisfy a noble woman.

“That reminds me, the field exercise is coming up. Is it mandatory for all the guys to participate? How much distance will we cover?”

Before he realised it, Seria had returned to reality and directed a question at him.

“It seems the total distance is 20 kilometers.”
“Hee~. That’s impossible for me. I can’t walk that much. It’s already such a pain to walk from here to the school building.”

Seria fell limp on her desk; she grew tired from just thinking about it. Her long beautiful white hair spread out covering the desk.

“I think Seria-sensei needs a bit more exercise.”

Rio said so while being both amazed and worried for her.
Other than for lectures, Seria rarely ever left her laboratory room.
Even for the daughter of a noble, would not being so out of shape negatively affect her health?

“Yeah yeah[16]. As long as there are carriages, I’m fine. Something like that.”

Hearing the typical lines of a hikikomori[17], Rio smiled wryly and offered Seria the finished black tea brewed to her preferences.

Notes

1. Gender neutral appearance

2. Instead of female marrying a male of higher status, it’s the other way around; reverse gold digger?

3. Implying he's gay if you're slow on the uptake

4. Ed: No, she's mine =3=

5. Reference to a VA in Japan who is referred to by her fans as 17 years + xx months (actually 30+)

6. Dismissive tone

7. Shut in

Chapter 10

Field Training~Part 1~

In the Bertram Kingdom's Royal Institute, participating in the annual inter-class field exercise competition was the primary goal for all final year elementary students.
Although it was called field exercise, the participants primarily consisted of noble children.
Routes from the start to finish were prepared beforehand so the students only needed to select and follow one of the prearranged routes to arrive at their destination. There were no penalties for slower groups.
Participation was mandatory for the boys, though optional for the girls.
It should be noted that while only the sixth year elementary students were required to participate in the event, fifth year students were allowed tag along as support, as well as having it serve as a practice run for the following year.

「Now then, we'll be holding a meeting to discuss our plan for the exercise. I believe that we must achieve first place.」

It was Alphonse, the second son of Marquis Rodan, who was elected as class leader.
His goal was to proceed to the intermediate curriculum of the Royal Institute and later enlist with the Imperial Guard Knights.
Although, he was greatly surpassed by Christina and Roana in terms of social standing as well as academic performance, the class leader had always traditionally been a male student.
Though slightly pretentious, he possessed good manners that balanced well with his handsome looks.

「In our class are Her Royal Highness, Princess Christina and the mage of Duke Fontine's household, Roana-sama. Both are known

prodigies in the usage of magic. Furthermore, from the fifth year students, we will also be receiving assistance from the renowned divine healer, Flora-sama. In all of the Institute's long proud history, never has a student been blessed with such exceptional members.」

The majority of the class was passionately listening to Alphonse's speech.

「We will likely encounter low level monsters like goblins, but they'll be no match against our combined power. Everything will proceed smoothly if you follow my orders.」

Even though the exercise was arranged by the Institute, it did not mean it was completely free of danger.
They were to progress along the edge of the neighbouring forest where a variety of monsters made their nests.
If they were to happen upon low level monsters, as long as the students could use magic, it was unlikely for them to fall behind. That said, it was certainly not an exercise that should be taken lightly.
One of the aims of the outdoor field exercise was to develop a tolerance towards murder by having the students kill humanoid monsters such as goblins.

「Also, we need to be careful when selecting what to bring for our luggage, bring only what's necessary. A detailed list of essential and nonessential items can be found on the blackboard. Everyone, please have a look at it!」

Everyone in the class noted down what was written on the blackboard onto a piece of parchment.
Looking at the scene with a pleased expression, Alphonse then glared at Rio.

「Oi, peasant… Rio, you bastard! Listen carefully. By no means are you to bring shame to Her Highness the Princess. I won't be accepting anything but first place.」

Alphonse gave him a stern warning.

「Since you can't use magic, you'll undoubtedly be holding everyone back, but take heart. You only need to follow my orders. You can be

useful by carrying everybody's luggage.」
「Understood. I will abide to your command.」

It was a miserable way of speaking but he only needed to endure a little longer until graduation.
Since he had no reasons to object, Rio obediently accepted Alphonse's order.

Thus, the day of the outdoor field exercise arrived.
Over two hundred students gathered at the starting point.
Each class consisted of seventy students.
All the students were equipped with training uniforms, colour coded according to their class, and light leather armour. Rio's class uniform was white.

In addition to the students' personal luggage, there was also the class luggage to carry during the march.
Rio was the appointed class baggage carrier.
He was given the most inconsequential role.

「A— Ano, are you okay? If you're carrying so much luggage, it'd be heavy…」

While the whole class consented to have Rio carry nearly 30 kilograms worth of luggage, only a single person worriedly called out to Rio.
It was Flora.
It was the first time since the kidnapping incident that the two spoke to one another.
Ever since he enrolled in the Institute, he never talked with Flora.
He was caught off guard from unexpectedly being talked to.

「That, should I help carry a portion?」

While Rio was troubled on how to respond, Flora offered her help.

「No, I'm alright. Thank you, I appreciate your concern.」

There was no way he could accept Flora's offer.
By doing so, he would draw sharp criticism from those around him.
Her selfless nature made it difficult for him to believe she belonged to a privileged class.

He was happy enough with her concern.
However, she was slightly ignorant to how her actions could affect the surrounding people.
Therefore Rio could only decline her offer and express his gratitude.

「Flora-sama, it is not worth your time to associate yourself with this peon. It is best to leave petty jobs to petty people.」

Alphonse, with Stead tagging along, interrupted Rio and Flora from a distance.

「Hoo~, such great strength, as expected of an uncivilized brute.」

Seeing Rio carry his personal luggage as well as an additional 30 kilograms of class luggage for the march, Stead spat a sarcastic line.
Having grown accustomed to such insults, Rio ignored him and waited for departure.

Immediately after that, the students began to march.
After walking for approximately an hour from the starting point, they arrived at the first checkpoint situated just outside the forest.

「Gentlemen, I bring good news. With the cooperation from the fifth grade student Stead, of the Duke Euguno household, we have discovered a shortcut. It is located just a little further ahead.」

As they were detouring around the forest after arriving at the first checkpoint, Alphonse announced the existence of a shortcut.
The students began to excitedly talk amongst themselves.

「Silence please. If we use this route, we will undoubtedly be able to obtain first place. According to the map, we would need to walk around the forest to arrive at the finish line. However, with the shortcut, we can cut right through the forest instead.」

Hearing his words, Rio checked his map to confirm their current location.
Prior to the field exercise, the area around the arranged paths were already carefully inspected by the Knights.
Therefore, there were hardly any dangers as long as they followed the prearranged route.

「I am opposed to this idea. We will unable to take responsibility for Her Royal Highness Princess Christina and Her Royal Highness Princess Flora should, in the unlikely event, a dangerous situation arise outside of the predetermined routes.」

Roana voiced her objection at Alphonse's suggestion.

「What does Her Royal Highness Princess Christina think?」

Unable to disregard Roana's objection, Alphonse sought Christina's opinion.

「I too, do not think that we're prepared enough to take the shortcut. I think we should try to avoid any unnecessary dangers. Still, it's not my decision to make since you're our leader. But know that if anything were to befall Flora or myself, you will be held responsible and it will be impossible for me to protect you.」

Christina objected from a different angle.
Hearing her warning, Alphonse imagined the consequences if such a situation were to occur and immediately got cold feet.

「Alphonse-senpai and I have already thoroughly investigated the shortcut. Although quite obscure, there is a proper road that goes through the forest. It seems that it used to be a highway. There is nothing to worry about if we stay on the road.」

Stead, who was standing beside the pale-looking Alphonse, spoke in a confident tone.

「Alphonse-senpai. With this, we'll be able to earn Her Highness the Princess' favour.」

Stead whispered in a nearly inaudible voice so that only Alphonse could hear.
Alphonse regained his confidence and ambition returned to his face.

「Alright, as promised, we will set the record for the fastest clear of all time. This will be our graduation gift to Her Royal Highness Princess Christina. Got it, everyone!?」

Thus, the class, along with their fifth year support students, cheered

in approval.
Looking at the surrounding area on the map, Rio noted that the shortcut proposed by Alphonse was not detailed on the map.
Certainly, if they were to proceed along the predetermined route, they would be required to detour along the outer perimeter of the forest.
By cutting through the forest instead, they could shorten the distance by nearly a half.

However, Stead said that the shortcut was once a highway.
It was not unusual for a highway to be established through a forest.
In a kingdom that was mostly covered in forests, there was no choice but to establish routes through the forest.
Nevertheless, some old roads were no longer in use nowadays.
A variety of reasons why a highway would be abandoned existed including convenience, traffic, and changes in topography.
Furthermore, in the forest where human hands did not reach, the risk of encountering monsters and other vicious creatures was considerably higher than normal.

With the exception of Rio, all the students in the group were capable of using magic. So even if they were attacked by a group of low level monsters, they could deal with them without too much trouble.
They may even be able to defeat an intermediate level monster.
However, this assumption would only hold true if the students could flawlessly work together as a cohesive unit.
For an unorganised group that could hardly even march properly, it was nigh impossible for them to operate at their peak potential.

And yet, they still possessed baseless self-confidence.
They were all raised as nobles so they never thought there were any obstacles they could not overcome.
One could say that because the nobles claimed they were the elites of the Bertram Kingdom, they tended to be overconfident in regards to their abilities.
And that tendency led them to make foolish decisions.
Still, the group was only adversely affected because their leader did not allow any alternatives.

He wanted to impress the Royal Family by showing off his

dedication.
However, Alphonse was a typical example of a military man, inflexible and only capable of faithfully carrying out orders. He was more suitable as a soldier than as a commander.
That was Rio's assessment of Alphonse.
He did not possess the qualities of a leader.
In fact, he was easily persuaded by anyone of higher rank.
Unfortunately, he was chosen by the consensus of the class so Rio was unable to intervene in his decisions.
He doubted he would be overlooked if he did anyway.

「Her Royal Highness Princess Christina and Roana-sama, I understand you are worried, but I will dispel them once we are on our way. Please, this way.」

Stead, together with Alphonse, took the initiative and began to lead the way.
As soon as they entered the forest, the road came into view.
The road was certainly wide enough for a few people to walk side-by-side, but lush vegetation grew all along the sides limiting their vision.
Unless one knew about the shortcut beforehand, it was doubtful that anyone would enter the forest.
It was a very desolate road.

「…What do you think? The Kingdom once attempted to establish a road through the forest. The project seems to have been abandoned but adventurers still regularly use this road.」

His voice was a bit stiff.
Having seen the state of the road, Alphonse and Stead lost a bit of their confidence.
However, they could no longer change their minds as it was already too late to turn back.
Seeing the state they were in, Rio guessed that they only got their information from rumours and did not do any proper investigation prior to the exercise.
They had already declared that the path was safe so they could go back on their words and lose face.

Maintaining their reputation was really difficult for nobles.
For those who were obsessed with their reputation, to display a blunder would bring unbearable shame. As such, they prioritised their reputation over all else.
Perhaps it was already a part of their nature.
Sighing deeply in his mind, Rio could only watch in awe as they struggled to maintain their reputation.
Judging from the expressions of Christina and Roana, the two girls seemed to share a similar opinion as Rio.
It was rare for their opinions to match.
Adjusting the weight on his back, Rio could not help but feel anxious and prayed that no trouble would arise.
The load somehow felt heavier.
Eventually, the group made their way into the depths of the forest.
As they advanced, the male students competed against one another to kill the occasional low level monsters that appeared.

「With this, I've graduated to become a full-fledged killer.[11]」
「Congratulations.」

The boys were ecstatic about their first kill.
Rio thought they were acting too carefree in such a situation.
While he had yet to truly feel the urge to kill a human or animal, he had already experienced fighting for his life when he rescued Christina and Flora.
At the time, Rio was only able to freely move his body thanks to mastering martial arts in his past life. Yet, he was still far from ideal.
The mental strain caused by coordinating his movements was clearly evident.
After the fight, his body became sluggish and he could not control his frantic breathing.
One must experience a battle with their life on the line to adequately perform on the battlefield.
Slaughtering weak monsters using overwhelming numbers would not grant them any valuable combat experience.
Judging from the one-sided slaughter, he could say with confidence that none of them had ever experienced a life or death situation before. They could only uselessly cower in fear on a real battlefield.
As long as they were nobles, the chances that they would be given

command of military unit were quite high.
In a place where the lives of men could be stolen in an instant, the day when they pay for their mistakes would undoubtedly come.
Nevertheless, whether they lived or died on that day had nothing to do with Rio.

Even though he was shouldering an absurd amount of luggage and entertaining random thoughts, he did not neglect to remain vigilant of his surroundings.
He had long ago become aware of the sporadic approach of a group of goblins.
And, even though they had been walking for quite some time, the endless sea of trees would not end.
Fatigue began to accumulate in the overly energetic students as they continued along the sloping path.
Talking became sparse since they no longer had enough energy to speak.
Silently carrying the heaviest load amongst the students, the dire situation became increasingly apparent to Rio who was observing them from the side.
However, thanks to secretly casting physical strengthening and body reinforcement on himself, Rio was the most composed member of the group.

「At this rate, can we really reach the finish line first?」

No matter how far they progressed, the forest refused to end. One of the students finally voiced his doubts.

「As it stands, won't we be last?」
「Shouldn't we return to the normal route now?」

The first complaint opened the floodgates for numerous other complaints from all over the group.
With everybody voicing their discontent as they pleased, the noise they generated attracted additional monsters.

「Another goblin?」
「Hasn't there been an increase in goblins since a while ago?」

As a result of their ample population, the goblin was the epitome of

low level monsters.
Their high fertility rate was characterised by the popular saying, “If you find one, you’re guaranteed to find another thirty.”
To alleviate the group’s growing anxiety, Alphonse and Stead enthusiastically went ahead to slay the goblins.

「Si— Silence! E— Everyone calm down! Like I said, we’ll be fine! Everything is going according to plan. Right, Stead?」
「Ri— Right. Everything’s going exactly as planned. Alphonse-senpai is our leader so be quiet and follow his orders. Besides, the only monsters that appear are goblins after all. They’re no match for our magic. Not only that, but we can also collect the goblins’ magic stones to earn some pocket change right?」

Finishing off the goblins, Alphonse and Stead noticed the panicked state the class was in and desperately tried to come up with excuses to alleviate everyone’s fears.
The students immediately calmed down after hearing their words.
Alphonse’s household was quite influential, but Stead of the Duke Euguno household held even greater influence.
There did not exist a single person amongst the group who dared to openly defy them.
However, the morale of the group remained low.

The number of goblins they encountered gradually increased as the ventured further along the path.
At last, the time came when they could no longer proceed any further.

The endless sea of trees suddenly ceased.
What appeared before them was a wide open space.
Regrettably, it was not the opening they had hoped for.

「Oi… this isn’t the exit.」
「Re— Really? Look, the goal’s over there!」
「You can’t be serious! How the heck are we going to get over there!?」

The group was currently standing at the edge of a cliff.
The area around them had become a slightly elevated hill, 30 meters in height.

Lacking any proper preparations, it would be a near suicidal act to attempt to descend the cliff.

It was the reason why the Kingdom had to abandon the construction of the highway.
The existence of the cliff was only discovered after they had cleared out a portion of the forest for the highway.

They would only be able to descend the cliff if they possessed the courage and necessary skill.
Unfortunately, the majority of the group were lacking in both departments.
Even if one or two of them were able to descend, it would be meaningless if the rest could not.

All at once, the bottled up frustration exploded.
They did not dare voice their discontent at Stead, who was the son of a highly influential noble, so many of them directed their anger at Alphonse instead.

「Nee~」

In the situation that was quickly spiralling out of control, one student who had kept her silence until then finally raised her voice.
The owner of that voice was Christina.
Her voice was soft but carried a regal power nobody could ignore.

「Up until now, I've refrained myself from questioning your orders since you are the leader of this group, but how did we end up in this situation? I've obediently obeyed your orders, even if the one issuing them was a fool. Our group is now on the verge of collapsing under your leadership.」
「Tha— That is…」
「Honestly, now that it has reached this point, even if nothing else happens, it is already impossible for me to come up with any excuses to protect you. I thought I already gave you quite a severe warning about this.」

Receiving her icy stare, Alphonse could not come up with a viable excuse no matter how hard he tried.

「And Stead, don't you have anything to say? You have been considerably meddlesome despite only participating as support for our class. I wonder why that is?」

Christina shifted her gaze over to Stead and questioned his conduct.

「I— I am…」

Under her unmoving gaze, Stead's face became ghastly pale.

「The orders of a commander are absolute for his soldiers. This may be a field exercise but right we're no different from a military unit. We have no choice but to heed your words because you are the commander.」
Having lost her interest in Stead, Christina returned to reprimanding Alphonse.

「I understand that you highly value your reputation as nobles. However, understand that with great power comes great responsibility, Commander-dono[21].」

Everybody fell silent and at once and accusing stares gathered on Alphonse.

「Everybody…」

Alphonse was at a loss for words and was on the verge of crumbling under the pressure. At that moment, numerous spears came flying out from the brush and pierced several students.

「Eh…?」
Unable to understand what just happened, the students who were struck could only let out perplexed voices.

「Lo— Look, over there! A swarm of goblins!」

One of the students noticed the predicament and pointed towards the woods.
Although the forest interior was dark, the bits of sunlight that were able to penetrate through the trees allowed them to clearly see ahead.
Therefore, the students were able to perceive what lay before them.

The forest was filled with goblins, surrounding the students who were backed up against the cliff.

「O— Oi… are those all goblins…?」
「O— Ogres too!」

Generally, goblins only grew as tall as a human child. Their individual strength was very weak and most would lose in a fight against a human adult.
While they were difficult to deal with in numbers, as long as a human adult was armed, not even an amateur would lose in a one on one.
However, ogres were much more dangerous than goblins.
Standing over 2 meters tall, and with physical far surpassing that of a human adult, ogres acted as leaders for packs of goblins.
Currently, in front of the students stood a mixed group of goblins and ogres.
Before the students process the fact that they were being ambushed, several more spears came flying at them from the forest.
It was the ogres who were throwing the spears.

「Those ogres over there! They're the ones throwing the spears at us!」
「Understood! Fortunately there doesn't seem to be any orcs present! Alphonse, quickly, your orders! Kuu!」
Christina was quickly analyzed the situation while Roana relayed the information to the rest of the students.

「Uwaaaaa! 」

However, the students struck by spears could not contain their panic and began to behave violently.
Stead was among the ones struck.
Although one could potentially die if a vital was hit, currently they only suffered minor injuries.
Yet, most of the students present had never experience pain or injury before.
Therefore they had no reason to panic even when struck by spears[3].

「Pull it out! PULL IT OOOUUUUTTTTT!!!」

Stead howled madly with no regards to shame or dignity.
「Uwaa! Stop it!」
「O— Oi, stay back!」

He tried to draw near the other students to have them pull the spear out but only succeeded in plunging the rest of the students into panic.

「Mommyyy! Daddyyy!!!」

With his shoulder pierced by a spear, Stead thrashed around violently, colliding against the surrounding students. He finally crashed into Flora blowing her away.

「Kyaa!」

Flora, who was standing near the ledge, was knocked down onto the edge of the cliff.

「Flora!」

Seeing Flora on the verge of falling off the cliff, Christina cried out loudly.
The sound of shifting dirt could be heard followed by the ground beneath Flora giving away.

「Hii!?」

Experience a weightless sensation, Flora’s face was dyed in despair.

「A—!」

Watching the disastrous scene unfold before his eyes, Rio’s body moved on its own.
Before he knew it, he had thrown away the luggage on his back and dashed forward, casting physical strengthening and body reinforcement.

At that moment, she reached her hand towards the sky and Rio grabbed it.
Had he been even one second too late, Rio would have missed her hand.

Their eyes met.
He could tell from her expression that she was astonished.

He had rushed out to save her without considering the consequences. A moment later, he came to regret his rash decision.
Nothing good would come by acting heroically.
He had already experienced it from the events that transpired five years ago.
Despite that, he somehow managed to repeat the same mistake.
Did he not once again give in to foolish hypocrisy?
Or did he act impulsively?
If he did not consider saving her, he wondered why his body moved on its own.

Whatever the reason may have been, he had already committed himself and could only follow through with his actions.
Grabbing Flora's hand, Rio spun his body around pulling her up.
Using his strengthened body's momentum, he threw Flora back on top of the ridge.

「Kyaa!」

Thud, Flora fell onto the opposing ridge.
Confirming her safety, Rio a trivial thought entered his mind.
He wondered if she would forgive him for making her suffer a few scratches from the rough landing.
And now, he was to pay the price for saving her.
Rio's body plummeted towards the bottom of the cliff.

Notes

1. He originally says he graduated from being a virgin in murder

2. She calls him that in a mocking way

3. The author is seriously overestimating a bunch of elementary schoolers…

Chapter 11

Field Training~Part 2~

Everyone in the group who saw Rio fall off the cliff was dumbfounded.

「Now's our chance to exterminate them! Alphonse! Come back to your senses! We can use our magic together to defeat the goblins! Hurry!」

Roana was the first to regain her senses and shouted at Alphonse, the group's leader.

「Pr— Protect them! All men, form a wall around Christina-sama and Flora-sama! Those in the rear barrage them using attack magic. Reform the ranks! Try to avoid using fire magic, use ice if possible. Use wind or water instead if you can't use ice. Attack on my signal! Those who can use『Heal』please attend to the injured!」

Awakened by Roana's words, the students calmed down as Alphonse was finally able to issue somewhat coherent orders.

「Attack!!!」

Alphonse waited for the appropriate timing and gave the order to attack.
On his signal, the students aimed at the approaching horde of goblins and unleased scores of offensive magic simultaneously.
The combined magic released by the students gave off an deafening roar as it collided with the trees and goblin vanguards while also kicking up a cloud of dust.

「We did it!」
「Ha! They're only monsters after all!」
「Goblins are merely fodder before humanity's magic!」

Looking at the scene before them, the students raised shouts of joy convinced they were victorious.

「Gugyaa!!!」

However, a dull voice was suddenly heard from within their group.
From inside the cloud of dust, several wooden spears thrown by the ogres came flying towards them.

「It— It can't be…」

The students underestimated the ogres' accuracy because of the cloud of dust and were struck one by one.
Nearly ten students had already fallen victim to the spears.
It would not be surprising if somebody was killed.
Fortunately, thanks to the presence of multiple healers in their group, nobody received a fatal hit and were able to prevent any deaths.

「Don't panic! Those who can use healing magic continue treating the injured. It was only a single attack after all! Once more, attack!」

With a competant leader, the students could efficiently work together as a robust group.
Those who could wield magic stood at the pinnacle of humanity's might, and all the students in the group were able to use magic to some extent.
Within a span of ten or so seconds, a torrent of dozens of magic attacks rained down on the goblins.
The vanguard reinforced their bodies using magic and cut down the goblins who were running towards them.
The remaining goblins and ogres were helpless under the constant barrage of magic.
Continuing for several more minutes, the students one-sidedly attacked the goblins using long ranged magic and thus finally eradicated them all.

「Nine are injured. Fortunately, nobody died. The severely wounded have also been healed by Christina-sama and Flora-sama. But, we're missing one.」

Roana confirmed the group's condition and reported to Alphonse

with a sullen expression.
There was not a person among the students who did not know about the missing person. Awkwardness slowly spread throughout the group.

「Fo— For now, let's hear everyone's reports! Is there anyone who's able to share with us what happened? How did Flora fall in the first place?」

Alphonse spoke in a hurry.
Blood rushed to his head as he tried to resolve the scandal that occured under his leadership.
Alphonse looked at Flora for an explanation.

「Uh— Uhm, somebody bumped into me from behind… the one who bumped into me was…」

Flora spoke in bewilderment.
Because Stead bumped into her from behind, Flora only knew she was knocked away but not who the culprit was.
Suddenly, a student timidly raised his hand and spoke hesitantly.

「Uhm, Her Highness the Princess fell because Stead bumped into her…」

Many students immediately turned and looked at speaker.
He just spoke the unspeakable.
However, whether or not he was afraid of Stead, the student spoke in a firm voice.
Stead glared at the student with the face of a demon.

「Are you saying it's my fault!? I was also pushed! I'm also a victim here!」

Being the target of skepticism, Stead tried to defend himself.

「N— No. I'm not saying it's Stead's fault.」

The student shirked under Stead's glare.

「Then who said it's my fault!?」
「N— No. There… was someone who bumped into Stead right?」

「That's right! I was pushed! It's their fault! A lot of people pushed me!」
「Everyone was in a panic at the time so bumping into one another was unavoidable. We were all focused on the monsters. Given the situation, it can't be helped that we became unaware of our surroundings. Now how will you go about finding who's at fault?」

Having become fed up with the lack of progress, Roana took charge of the discussion.
Stead glanced at Roana in annoyance.

「Then what should we do?」

Alphonse asked for clarification.

「Should we help him or should we leave this forest? Or neither?[11]」

As if the answer was already obvious, Roana spoke with a displeased expression.

「Th— That is for me to decide…」

Roana was taken aback at Alphonse's response, unsuitable for a leader.

「What the heck are you saying at such a time Commander…」
「Th— Then I'd also like to hear everyone's opinions. What does everyone think?」

Alphonse sought opinions from the group.

「In the first place, is he even still alive?」
「Can anyone even be saved from this height?」
「We should get out of here quickly. Monsters might appear again.」
「Well, Flora-sama's life was saved in exchange for only the life of a commoner.」
「That's right. It's an honour for him to give his life for her.」

The group only expressed reluctance in rescuing Rio.

「Alright, we'll claim he's the one who pushed me and I was the only witness.」

Stead spoke in a low voice only audible to Alphonse.

「That peasant Rio is the culprit. During the battle, the coward became frightened and ran into me who was struck by a spear. As a result, I was unable to avoid Flora-sama and collided with her. The coward, afraid of being charged with murdering royalty, in desperation tried to rescue Flora-sama. He subsequently fell off the cliff by accident. Isn't that the case?」

Most of the students nodded in agreement.

「Su— Such a thing!」

Flora cried out in confusion.

「Are you speaking the truth?」

Christina who had kept silent thus far asked Stead in a low but authoritative voice.
Stead unconsciously took a step back under her piercing gaze.

「Ye— Yes. There's no mistake about it.」
「Is that so… I understand.」

Christina continued to stare at Stead for a while before removing her gaze.

「Unless there are other testimonies that contradict his testimony, we cannot overturn his testimony. I'm sorry but let it go.」

Christina muttered only loud enough for Flora to hear.
Christina did not see who bumped into Stead either so she could not protect Rio from his false testimony.
Furthermore, even if there was a witness, Christina already knew that they would not dare to testify against Stead.
There were no students whose families were influential enough to go against him, some even belonged to his house's faction.
It was unwise to create hostilities between the noble factions. Even the Institute took careful note of that during class distribution.

「Eh!? Onee-sama!」

Hearing Christina's words, Flora raised a condemning voice.

「Flora-sama, I understand that you nearly lost your life and are grateful to him. However, it was his own fault. You do not need to worry yourself over such a trivial existence.」

Not understanding Flora's internal turmoil, Alphonse spoke to her.
His words indicated that he was in the same opinion as Stead.
It was as if he wanted to steer the conversation away from the subject.

「Na~」

Flora was at a loss on how to rebut his words.
Alphonse moved his sights over to Christina.

「In any case, we need to escape from this forest. Is it fine for me to lead the way? Staying here any longer will put Your Highness the Princess as well as our group in unnecessary danger. It's unfortunate that we can no longer achieve first place but we must report the situation as soon as possible.」
「You're right… Well I'll leave it to your discretion since you're the commander.」

No longer caring, Christina replied in an apathetic voice.

「Please wait a minute! Are we just going to abandon him!?」

Flora stubbornly revived the issue as Alphonse tried to close the discussion.

「I cannot expose Your Highness the Princess and our group to any further danger for the sake of that worthless peasant.」

Alphonse reiterated Rio's abandonment in a firm voice.

「I— If that's the case, then I will go rescue him!」

Many students were bewildered upon hearing Flora's words.
None of them could believe what she said.

「You must not! Our dignity is in serving you, Flora-sama. Why must Flora-sama concern herself with that commoner?」

Alphonse's expression was one of pure disbelief.

Why?
What was she saying?
Did she seriously mean what she said?
Alphonse knew Flora was kind and caring but he could not help but become angered at her words.

「What the heck are you saying!? We wouldn't be in this situation in the first place if you led us properly!」
「Tha— That is… I'm not saying that I bear no responsibility in this matter. I will bear the responsibility of leading the group into danger. However I will not allow your life to be put at risk.」

Alphonse sent a quick glance at Stead.
Stead nodded and spoke to Flora.

「Princess Flora, Alphonse-senpai feels deep responsibility for the current situation. He cannot risk any further casualties. I beg of you to please understand his predicament.」
「…」

Flora wanted to argue back but noticing the eyes of the surrounding students, she was unble to form any words.
She understood that nobody amongst the group would support her.
Although they all respected her, none shared her opinion.
Just a glance at their faces told her that.
Flora trembled.

「Bu— But he saved me?」

Flora was barely able to squeeze out her words.

She thought of Rio.
Raven black hair foreign to the Kingdom, a handsome face, one year her senior, the outcast considered to be the problem child of the Institute.
That was what Flora knew about him.
He was the one who saved her and her older sister from the kidnappers over five years ago.
She had harboured a sense of guilt towards him ever since then.
She thought surely, he must hate her.

Even so.
Ever since that day, Flora wanted to sincerely thank him.
As a result of helping her, he became involved in various troubles.
He was arrested and pitted against an Imperial Guard Knight.
Flora recalled the time when he fought against the Imperial Guard Knight.
She was also present among the spectators.
The boy who had rescued her was in even worse condition than before for some reason.
Blood stains were visible on his face and his mouth was swollen.
Perhaps he received those wounds during imprisonment.

Flora did not know what happened afterwards but before she knew it, her saviour was to enter the Royal Institute.
During his audience with the King, she was surprised at his appearance; she was captivated. She thought she would finally be able to convey her gratitude.
However, when she enrolled in the Royal Institute a year later, she learned that Rio was ostracized.
Furthermore, contrary to her expectations, he had also become the object of ridicule.

Flora had indirectly inquired her sister about Rio but was told to forget about him.
She did not understand why but it appeared that Christina found Rio rather unfavourable.

That was what Flora understood about Rio.
Eventually, she no longer knew how to approach him.
Despite being royalty, she did not possess any real power.
On the contrary, even if she wanted to do something for an individual, her status as royalty prevented her from doing so.
She could only rely on others.
It always ended up with somebody else taking care of issues for her.
It would be difficult for him to lead a favourable life if he was associated with her.
He was always expressionless.
Yet she could sense a hint of sorrow on his face.
Could it possibly be her fault?

Whenever Flora caught a glimpse of him in the Institute, she could not help but harbor such thoughts.

Somehow, her life was saved by him again.
Furthermore, he risked his own life.
For those reasons, she refused to abandon him.
However, taking advantage of her momentary silence, the students had begun leaving the forest.
Flora could only remain rooted on the spot in disbelief.

「Flora, I won't force you to agree with them, but we must leave immediately before the situation gets any worse. As it stands, we'll only be severely reprimanded.」

Christina calling to Flora who was left behind.

「With one dead, we'll only get scolded…?」

Flora's voice was barely audible.

「Not all lives are weighed equally. It's absurd to compare our lives to that guy's. Face it, we're royalty, he's nobody. We can't let the others bear responsibility of disregarding our safety here right?」
「What are you saying? We chose to participate of our own volition. We understood the risks.」

Flora disagreed in a sulky tone.

「The risks we understood cannot compare to the current risks. The most we were to expect from the field exercise were injuries, not death. If not for that, wouldn't it be impossible for us to participate?」

Christina explained their circumstances to Flora with a bitter expression.

「Normally we wouldn't even be allowed to participate but Father allowed us to because he dotes us. I don't want to needlessly worry Father any more.」

Having brought up her beloved father, Flora could not say anything back.

「…I …understand. 」

Flora's answer was lost amongst the rustling leaves of the forest. She absentmindedly began preparations to leave.

* * *

Going back 15 minutes before the group's departure, Rio was falling into a clearing in the forest below the cliff.
As expected, falling from a height of 30 meters was absolutely terrifying.
The closest comparison he could think of was being ejected from a moving roller coaster.

(Ah, shit. To think that I'd be testing the effectiveness of my body strengthening in this kind of situation…)

Watching the ground quickly approach, a trivial thought entered his mind.
With his reinforced body, there was a chance that he would live while only having to endure some pain.
Body reinforcement at full strength would allow him to pulverize a rock with his fist.

Still, it was terrifying.
Even knowing that he probably would not die, it was only natural to feel so when falling from such heights without so much as a rope.

In an attempt to soften the landing, Rio released magical body from within his body and manipulated it.
It was similar to casting magic yet he utilized completely different principles. The magic interfered with the laws of nature and a gust of wind was released before him.

The magic he just used was a knock off formed through copying the flow of magic from the Contract Ceremony. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it Spirit Arts.
Spirit Arts were a form of magic practiced by elves, dwarves, and

beastmen.

Rio was unable to use contract magic yet was able to use Spirit Arts, a form of magic unusable by the majority of the human race.
While human Spirit Arts users did exist, they were extremely rare and as such, very little information relating to Spirit Arts existed.
The only reason he knew about its existence was because he happened upon an old book which contained a brief summary about it. However, the information was insufficient so he could not learn much.
What he did understand was that he did not require a contract or incantation to invoke magic. Of course, that was all speculation.

By producing a gust of wind right under him, Rio was able to reduce the speed of his descent.
He began to slow down.
However, the force of gravity was still greater than his magic making him unable to completely negate his fall.
Fortunately, his current speed was enough for a safe landing.
Rio adjusted his landing position by manipulating the wind and aimed at the trees.
Catching a reasonably thick tree branch, he was able to kill his momentum.
He ignored the considerable strain he felt from his gloved hands.

「Hmph, hah.」

The result was an injury free landing.
He mended his hands with recovery Spirit Arts so there were not any problems.

Glancing at the cliff overhead, Rio could not help wonder what happened up there.
It would not be difficult for him to return to the top and rejoin the group.
The cliff could be said to be quite tall but he could easily climb the 30 meters back.

On the other hand, it would be suspicious for Rio, who could not use magic, to be able to instantly climb back up from a 30 meter drop uninjured.

He could only sigh at the troublesome situation.

Rio decided it was best to hide himself for a while and monitor the situation.
He strengthened his body and stealthily ascended the cliff like an acrobat.
In a matter of seconds, he reached the top and hid behind a tree upon hearing the voices of the other students.

(Well, I thought it'd turn out like this.)

He sighed in his mind while eavesdropping on the students.
He was not expecting anything favourable from the beginning.
Only Flora seemed to worry about him but eventually, she too was convinced to leave by the surrounding students.
Even if he claimed that he miraculously survived, it would be awkward to rejoin them immediately.
It would be better to lay low for a few days.

(Tch, it's troublesome as expected.)

Watching the group disappear into the forest, Rio thought of the hardships ahead of him.

Notes

1. She's talking about Rio

Chapter 12
False Charge

The field exercise ended on the evening of that day. Currently the headmaster of Royal Institute was racking his brain on how he should handle the matter.

「It's been reported that the responsibility for causing the group to deviate from the established course lie on the sons of Duke Euguno and Marquis Rodan. It's a fact that Princess Flora nearly fell of the cliff as a result of their actions.」

Hearing the report of the incident from the teacher in charge of the field exercise caused the headmaster of the Royal Institute, Garcia[11], all kinds of worry.

The students strayed from the established route which had been confirmed to be safe, and deliberately entered the forest endangering the princesses' lives.
Furthermore, they were attacked by a swarm of goblins.
The series of events were allowed to happen because it was backed by a number of influential nobles.

When he first heard the reports, he unintentionally ended up seriously considering an escape plan.

「Although there were a handful of injured students, thanks to the presence of several『Heal[12]』users, it didn't become a serious problem. One is dead, or rather should I say, missing. The student's name is Rio.」

Garcia breathed a sigh of relief since it was a problem that could be ignored for the time being.
Fortunately, there were no serious casualties among the members of the royal family and nobles.

There seemed to be a single casualty according to the reporting teacher, but it appeared that the teacher did not want to make a big deal out of either.
Garcia was extremely grateful for that.

「That former orphan youngster, huh. Well, this must be a blessing in disguise.」

Not to mention that Rio did not have a guardian much less parents.
To the kingdom he was only a mere commoner.
It could be argued that the King who recommended Rio was his guardian, but after he entered the Institute, the King completely disregarded him.
Garcia was told to only notify the King if he noticed any suspicious movements.
Since the King had to remain vigilant of the factional disputes within the Royal Court, he had no time to spare for a boy whose background was dubious at best.
There were simply not enough resources to spare for such trivialities.

Therefore, it was not particularly a problem if one such person disappeared.
Far from grieving, it was completely someone else's problem.

「Only one problem remains. It's regarding the person who caused Her Highness Princess Flora to nearly fall off the cliff.」

Garcia's stomach ached just thinking about how unpleasant it would be to deal with the issue.

「Alright, let's hear the story. Please continue.」

Despite his outward calm demeanor, it was only a facade forged with age.

「Firstly, the majority of the students including the son Duke Euguno insist Rio was responsible. On the other hand, only Her Highness Princess Flora of the royal family claims otherwise. However, there doesn't seem to be any reliable eyewitnesses. Her Highness Princess Christina and Duke Fontine's daughter have both chosen to

remain silent.」
「Mu, that… but wasn't Princess Flora a witness?」

Even if it were only one person, the opinion from the royal family could not be disregarded so easily.
However, if she did not have any witnesses it would be a different story.
He could ignore the two remaining girls who chose to remain silent.

「Yes. Also, that… Duke Euguno is strongly pressuring for us to acknowledge it is Rio's fault.」
「I expected as much.」
「What will you do?」

The reporting teacher awaited Garcia's decision.

「It won't be funny if His Majesty the King is overthrown by Duke Euguno over such an insignificant incident. Sacrificing one life is a small cost to pay. Making a reckless move will only more or less serve to worsen the issue.」
「Then, I shall submit a report to the Royal Palace indicating Rio as the offender. Is that alright?」
「Let's see… Duke Euguno can use this to smoothly deal the Royal Palace. At least this favours the popular opinion.」

Honestly, Garcia was not concerned about uncovering the truth.
The highest priority was to not let the incident spiral out of control. Pushing the blame was a convenient scenario. If he sided with the majority, there would not be any problems.

「Then, I will prepare the report for the Royal Palace according as we discussed.」

* * *

Three days after the field exercise ended, Rio snuck back into the

royal capital.
The royal capital was huge.
Therefore, it was not possible to enclose the whole city within the castle walls; people were free to come and go in the areas outside the walls.
On the other hand, it was necessary to present identification in order to access the inner areas surrounded by the walls.
The Royal Institute was situated in one of the inner areas, but that did not stop Rio from entering through unconventional means.
Covertly collecting information over the past few days, he learned that he was already considered dead.

The district where the Royal Institute was located was surrounded by formidable walls in addition to having guards stationed at all entrances. However, thanks to Rio's overwhelming physical abilities aided through magic, bypassing the walls was but a simple task.
Since infiltrating during the day would attract too much attention, he waited until night fell and made his way towards his destination via jumping from roof to roof.

(I hope you're alright but…)

Rio was going to meet the only person he could trust in the Royal Institute.
He did not want to risk getting caught in the middle of the noble district so he circled around the patrolling guards.
After effortlessly infiltrating the library, he made his way towards his final destination.

Light from a magic tool leaked through the gaps of the door.
The person he was looking for, Seria, was likely inside.
Knocking on the door, Rio waited for her to come out.

「Who? To come at such a time!」

Seria opened the door with a sullen expression, but the moment she saw Rio's face, it turned into an expression of surprise and relief.
Rio immediately gently covered her mouth with his hand as she was about to unintentionally cry out.

「Shhh~ I'm sorry but please don't make a ruckus. I'll tell you

everything in a moment.」

The tone, the atmosphere, the manners. Seria instantly realised the boy before her was truly Rio. Tears began welling up in her eyes as she embraced him.

「Rio! You, you're alive!」

As a result of Seria's short stature, her face was right in front of his as she looked up.
Rio was already taller than Seria.

「Ah— Sensei, please calm down… Sigh… as I thought, I've been pronounced dead huh…?」

Closing the door in a hurry, the moment they were inside, Seria bombarded him with questions.
He already expected to be considered dead, but there were other things he wanted to know about too.

「Please tell me what happened! I heard that Rio fell off a cliff and died during the field exercise. To make matters worse, Rio is treated as the criminal who endangered Princess Flora's life.」
「Uhm… I'm responsible for endangering Her Highness Princess Flora?」

It was a development that was a little bit outside of his expectations.
However, upon hearing the facts, he was immediately convinced.

「As I thought, they really were all fabrications. Tell me, what really happened?」

Seria believed that there was no way Rio would have done such a henious act.
Rio revealed a thin smile.
And then, he began summarizing the events that occurred.

「What the heck is that!? Let alone being innocent, isn't that a meritorious deed befitting for a medal of honour!? …But, you're in quite a precarious situation now.」

Hearing the story, Seria became angry.

However, her expression changed to one of worry in an instant.

「That's right. It's already been arranged to frame me as the one who attempted to kill a member of the royal family.」

Rio could instantly guess what was weighing on Seria's mind.

「If they find out Rio's alive, it'd be a disaster… That's right, you'll certainly be executed.」

Imagining the kind of treatment Rio would receive, Seria made a bitter face.
The handling of the case had probably already been decided by the court.
Once the top brass had made a decision, it was nigh impossible to overturn it.
Let alone a commoner like Rio who lacked any kind of support.
No matter how much he pleaded innocent, the outcome could easily be guessed.

「It's probably best for you to leave this kingdom.」

The only conclusion she could arrive at was to have Rio leave the kingdom.
His current situation was no joke.
Rio had planned to leave after graduation.
However, he had no choice now.

「…You're right.」

Seria did not want such an outcome either.
However, he could not prove his innocence by himself.
Therefore, she understood that he did not have any other choice.

「Well, I'll somehow manage.」

Rio spoke in a carefree manner.

Fortunately, he had enough money saved up that even a lower class noble could live lavishly for two years.
Most of the money he received from rescuing Christina and Flora remained untouched.

「But if you were to be arrested because of visiting me…」

Seria spoke in an apologetic manner.

「I'll be fine. If it wasn't for Seria-sensei, I wouldn't have been able to gather necessary information. You also believed my story. I'm really grateful, Sensei.」
「Rio…」
「I'm content with just informing Sensei of my survival. I will prepare for my escape and leave afterwards.」
「Rio, will you be okay? I'm worried. Should I come too? Do you have enough money?」

Rio smiled wryly at Seria's concern that was like that of an older sister.

「There will be an uproar is sensei disappears too[131]. Also, since I haven't had the need to spend much in the Institute, most of my money remains untouched.」
「I see…」

Yet, Seria still felt uneasy.
Understanding her anxiety, Rio spoke what came to his mind at that moment.

「I intend to head towards Yagumo, the hometown of my departed parents. Please don't worry, I'll periodically send Sensei letters under an alias during my travels. I promise you this won't be our last meeting.」

As one would expect, it would be scandalous if a distinguished lecturer of the Institute received a letter from a person named Rio.
However, he could avoid that risk by using an alias.

「Really? Absolutely? I won't forgive you if you forget okay? Also, I'm not too sure but isn't Yagumo really far away? Won't it be dangerous? If you find it impossible you must come back here okay?」

At his proposal, Seria once again embraced Rio with a smile.
As he was finally able to ease her anxiety, Rio began considering various possible names to use as an alias.

* * *

Christina visited her younger sister who had been holed up in her room for the past few days.
If given the choice, she would rather not tell her the truth.
However, it was the duty given to her by her father.
When Christina entered the room, she spotted the depressed Flora lifelessly sitting by the window.

「Flora.」
「Onee-sama!」

Noticing Christina's presence, Flora answered her sister in a frail voice.
Seeing the state Flora was in, Christina thought it would be better to remain silent. Yet she knew it was futile since Flora would learn of that boy's fate sooner or later. She steeled her resolve and called out to her younger sister.

「Judgement has been passed regarding matters about the incident. Alphonse received a one month suspension, Stead was determined to be innocent, and lastly… Rio has been charged with attempted murder of a member of the royal family and is sentenced to death. It's currently unknown whether he's still alive or not but a bounty has been put out for him. He's also at the top of the wanted list.」
「Wh— Why was he charged with attempted murder of a member of the royal family!? Moreover a bounty!?」

It was the reaction Christina expected.
The incident this time became a political mess so compromises had to be made.
As a member of the royal family, Christina understood that.
However, Flora did not.

Currently, Duke Euguno held the most support in the royal court. Even though the opposition was only the minority, Duke Albo could

not be taken lightly.
Although Helmut lost his position in the royal court five years ago, it did not stop Duke Albo from trying to rebuild his political influence through his son.
The two noble factions held radically different opinions on how the kingdom should deal with the Proxia Empire, which lay on the northern border of the Bertram Kingdom.
Duke Euguno's moderate faction insisted on maintaining strained relations with their northern neighbour and conserve the kingdom's strength. On the other hand, Duke Albo's hardline faction insisted on mounting an offensive against the Proxia Empire.
While Duke Euguno's faction currently held the most influence, if they were to falter here, the balance would be tipped in favour of Duke Albo's faction.
It would not be surprising if a civil war broke out.
As such, Christina understood why her father, King Philip III agreed to Duke Euguno's proposal.

Things would take a turn for the worst if Duke Euguno were to lose his position now.
Duke Euguno himself was using every possible means at his disposal to ensure there would be no obstructions for his successor.
He even went as far as to arrange all the testimonies of the students belonging to his faction to match.

The commoner was a convenient scapegoat for him.
It was easy for him to turn something from white to black[141].

「I understand your feeling, but the matter has already been settled.」

Her kindhearted sister had yet to understand the dirty side of politics.
If possible, Christina wanted her sister to never need to dirty her hands with such affairs in the future. It was her heartfelt desire.

「…No, I can't accept that!」

Shouting all of a sudden, Flora jumped down from her bed and bolted from the room.

She could not endure it.

She could not tolerate it.
Her expression said as much.

「Flora, wait!」

Trying to stop the Flora she never envisioned could display such anger, Christina called out in a fluster.
However, Flora headed straight towards their father's office without so much as hesitating.
An Imperial Guard Knight stood outside the office doors, but Flora barged into the office without even taking notice of the bewildered guard.

「Father! Headmaster!」

For some reason, the headmaster of the Royal Institute, Garcia, was also present.
However, Flora immediately turned her attention towards Philip III.

「…Is there something the matter? Flora.」

He could roughly guess the reason behind Flora's intrusion, but he never thought she would act so aggressively.
Philip III widened his eyes in surprise at her completely different demeanour.

「In regards to the incident from a few days ago, I believe the verdict to be unjustified.」

Again with this matter? Philip III could only sigh in his mind.

「…You know Flora. Listen to what I have to say. I do not believe you're lying but I beg of you, please overlook this incident.」
「Tch, why is father also saying such a thing!? He rescued me and fell off the cliff as a result! On top of that you're charging him with attempted murder of royalty!? And you Headmaster Garcia, why are you fabricating the report!?」
「Oh my, there is no such thing. I'm merely recording the students' testimonies.」

Garcia floated a smile like a jolly old man. It was one full of confidence.

「A duke's household and royalty share deep relations. The disgrace of a subject is not wholly unrelated to royalty. When the time comes to judge, it is necessary to choose the lesser of the two evils. In this case, the life of a commoner is well worth the sacrifice to uphold our honour. I want you to understand this since you also carry royalty in your blood.」

Philip III lectured his daughter from a logical standpoint.
Although Flora was quick-witted, her gentle disposition did not allow her to accept his explanation.
She was afraid to uncover the dirty truth.

「Ugh…」

Flora wanted to understand the father she loved so dearly.
She had always been able to come to an understanding before this incident.
However, no matter how hard she tried, she could not understand him this time.

Nevertheless, the father before her currently possessed the aura of a king, not that of a doting father.
Her subconscious told her that it would be futile to argue any further when he was like this.

「I… understand…」

She was barely able to squeeze those words out.
It was painful.
It was much more difficult to tolerate than she imagined, the pain that was.

「Princess Flora, as a member of the privileged class you will frequently have experiences like this. You must not let your emotions control you.」

Garcia's advice was not something a child could possibly do. In the first place, even he did not follow his own advice on occasions. Of course he did not voice his thoughts aloud.

「Garcia, don't bully my cute daughter so much.」
「Oh my, allow me to apologize for that.」

Having been lightly reprimanded by Philip III, Garcia chuckled and offered an apology.
Unsure as to whether Rio was still alive or not, Flora could only pray for his well-being.
The year was 996 of the Sacred Calendar. Five years and six months had passed since Rio's rebirth in this world.

Notes

1. TL: Not sure whether the headmaster is a man or woman, but I'll refer to them as a man for the time being because it's tradition in the kingdom for the leader to usually be male

2. Written as "Healing Magic", read as "Heal"

3. ED2: RIP flag, why you do this???

4. ED: For those who don't understand, it means "turning lies into truth".

Illustrations

Glossary

Quick Links

- Main Characters
- Side Characters
- Terms & Definitions

Main Characters

Amakawa Haruto / Rio
Age: 20 (at time of death) / 7 ~ 12

A mysterious orphaned child living in the slums of the Bertram Kingdom capital. He was the reincarnation of Amakawa Haruto [20 years old] who died due to an unfortunate accident in Japan. His most striking feature is his black hair which is extremely rare among the population making him the distinguishable amongst the orphans. His other features are his androgynous looks which was a combination of his features from his previous and current life. His has an unknown past, but swore to take a revenge to his mother's murderer. His fate changed drastically after he awakened to his previous life's memories as Amakawa Haruto. Their personalities merged into one with Haruto and Rio sharing control over the body and mind. Afterwards he saved two princesses of the Bertram Kingdom on an impulse only to get himself involved in their political disputes. As a reward he was allowed to enrol in the Bertram Kingdom Royal Institute. Later, due to false accusation, he became a fugitive before graduation. Now he embarked on a journey to his parents' home town in the Yagumo area.

Abilities :

- Ancient martial arts (from previous life)
- Swordsmanship
- Language comprehension (from Rio)
- Common knowledge (from previous life)
- Tea brewing (trained by Seria)
- Cooking (average knowledge in Chinese, Western, and Italian cuisine)
- Magic (fake; gained by mimicking the principle of the magic since he never succeeded in the Contract Ceremony)
- Magic (White/All-rounder Type)

Mysterious Childhood Sweetheart

Age: ???

Amakawa Haruto's [unrequited] childhood sweetheart. She mysteriously disappeared soon after their high-school entrance ceremony and devastated Haruto. He's always regretted not confessing his feelings to her… even until now.

Flora (Left)

Age: 6 ~ 11

Second princess of the Bertram Kingdom and younger sister of Christina. She and her sister were kidnapped by some thugs but were saved by Rio. She's kind by nature, thus loved by the people. She's also the only one who stood up for Rio when he was falsely accused. She shares the same violet coloured hair as her older sister. Enrolled in the Royal Institute as Rio's kouhai.

Abilities :

- Common knowledge
- Magic
- Kind-hearted
- ~~A loli~~

Christina (Right)

Age: 7 ~ 12

First princess of the Bertram Kingdom and older sister of Flora. She slapped Rio right after he saved her. Despite her fiery personality [which is more abated later], she dotes on her little sister and she's the type of person who would abandon 1 person for the benefit of many, as seen during the false accusation incident despite knowing that Rio was innocent. That way of thinking showed how she prioritized the Kingdom's well being. She's more mature and stout hearted than her sister. She shares the same violet coloured hair as her sister. Enrolled in the same class as Rio in Royal Institute.

Abilities :

- Royal knowledge
- Royal family disposition
- Magic
- Common knowledge
- Strict sister
- Doting sister
- Most disliked female character (somehow I know that even without poll)

Seria Claire (or Celia)

Age: 12 ~ 17

The youngest lecturer in the history of the Royal Institute. Hailed as a genius during her youth, she skipped multiple grades and became a professor at the tender age of 12. The only person in the Institute to acknowledge Rio, is his frequent conversation partner and she also taught him how to read. Rio later assisted her in her research as well as everyday chores (tidying up after her). She retains a youthful appearance despite her age (loli) due to her immense magical powers. Unbeknownst to Rio, she developed some feelings towards him during their time together. Her most striking features are her child-like appearance and long white hair.

Abilities :

- Forever 17 (given by Rio, though it was due to her immense magical powers)

- Magic (White/All-rounder type)
- Still a loli

Side Characters

Roana Fontin

Daughter of Duke Fontin, she and Christina are the two class representatives in Rio's class. Like Christina, she is also aware of Rio's innocence but also chose to ignore it. A perfect example of an ojou-sama. Enrolled in the same class as Rio in Royal Institute.

King Phillip III

The father of Flora and Christina and the current King of the Bertram Kingdom. He knew about Helmut's ambitions since his father's reign but couldn't do anything at the time since he was still on the Crown Prince. A just ruler and doting father, like his daughter Christina, he chose to abandon Rio to prevent a civil war despite knowing Rio was innocent. Currently waiting for the chance to punish the perpetrator of his daughters' kidnapping.

Alfred Emal

The second son of the Emal house. He works as the Imperial Guards' Deputy Commander protecting royalty and the court. His past… has unknown connections with Rio.

Helmut Albo

Commander of the Imperial Guards. He built his career from scratch acting as a loyal knight of the Kingdom. However his true intentions are to become Field Marshal and to use his influence to usurp the King's powers giving him control over the Kingdom.

Duke Euguno

A highly influential noble belonging to King Philip III's faction. In

contrast to his honourable outward appearance, he is willing to resort to any kind of underhand tactics to achieve his goals.

Steed Euguno

Egoistic and immature child of Duke Euguno. Makes up for his lack of ability by abusing his father's authority.

Alphonse Rodan

Some guy. Currently counting down the days until the end of his life.

Galucia

Head master of the Royal Institute.

Terms & Definitions

Odo (オド)

The life force existing in all living beings, similar to Ki. Once mastered, it can be controlled through one's will. This is the true form of what magicians call magical power. Mastering it will allow spirit art users to freely manipulate mana.

Mana (マナ)

Something that exists in nature. The Serei no Tami refer to it as "Force of Nature". Usually, it cannot be seen by the naked eye except by those who mastered the perception and control over their odo. Many magicians mistake mana as their own odo. Mana is the first step for a spirit to come into existence (which has vague self-consciousness). The mana phenomenon (magic phenomenon) occurs when an image is transmitted to it via oda. The image is prearranged (in the case of a magician) or self-arranged (in the case of a spirit).

Magic

The phenomenon created using a System Contract whose effects

change in odo in accordance to the pre-arranged phenomenon carved in System Contract. For example, a system contract for fireball only enables the contractor to use fireball in the shape of a ball and no more than that.

Spirit Art

The phenomenon caused by the image of the user that is transmitted directly via their odo to mana in their surrounding without the assistance of System Contract. For example, when Arthura created fireball atop her finger, she changed its shape (it is not restricted to any specific shape). On the other hand, magic can only produce it in the shape of a the System Contract and can never change unless a contract for a different shape is made.

Spirit

An existence that materializes into a being from the aggregation of mana and have their own will. Spirits can assist Spirit Art users to quicken the processing speed of their Spirit Art.

System Contract

Pre-arranged mana phenomenon that is carved onto the body of the contractor (usually a human).